



The Beginning After the End

Volume III Beckoning Fates
by TurtleMe

THE BEGINNING AFTER THE END

**- VOLUME 3 -
Beckoning Fates**

**-AUTHOR-
TurtleMe**

[tbatenovel | Royal Road]



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Vol. 1 Early Years

By. TurtleMe



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Vol. 2 New Heights

By TurtleMe

Chapter 43

Xyrus Academy

“WAKE UP!!!”

“OOF!” I feel the wind get knocked out of me as Elijah, oh so tenderly, pounds my sternum with his two fists with the force capable of resuscitating a corpse.

I throw the sleeping Sylvie at him in hopes that she'll protect me from my aggressive roommate.

“GAAHH! SYLV IT HURTS!!” As expected, the startled Sylv starts clawing at Elijah's face until she calms down and sits back down next to me.

“There has got to be a better way to wake me up besides physical pain.” I grumble, rubbing my stomach.

“You're telling me. Do you know how hard it is to wake you up and you reward me by throwing Sylvie at me? Even if she isn't in her full dragon form, do you know how sharp her claws are?” He winces as he carefully touches the shallow scratches that Sylvie inflicted.

“Anyways! We're going to be late if you don't hurry up and get ready. I've already washed up so get going lazy ass.” Elijah starts pushing me off the bed with his foot before starts dressing.

“Let's go wash up, Sylv!” I pretend to be excited as I grab my companion and head over to the shower.

‘Nuuuuuu~ Papa I don't want to shower! I'm cleaaan!’ “Kyuuuu~” The desperate wails of Sylv go out through the other ear as I haul her inside. Sylvie now has fur, or very thin, long soft scales that are very similar to fur. This means that she attracts dirt like a magnet so washing her more often becomes a necessity.

“Brother~ are you awake?” Ellie opens the door as I was still changing, Elijah was at least fully dressed but I only had my bottom half clothed.

“How do you like your big brother’s awesome muscles?” I flex my body like a professional body builder in a competition.

“Eww... All I see are skin and bones Brother.” She just shakes her head, giving me a look as if disappointed by the fact that she has a brother like me.

Tch... she was all over me when I danced with her during her birthday party. They grow up too fast.

“Hurry up and get dressed and let’s eat guys!” Ellie closes the door and goes on ahead while Elijah and I get ready.

The uniforms that Xyrus sent us weren’t too out of the ordinary. For me, it consisted of a white dress shirt, a grey vest, a maroon string we tie around our necks underneath the collar, and navy dress pants tailored perfectly. There was also gold pocket watched attached to a chain on my vest’s breast pocket, overall giving me a very scholarly look.

Elijah’s uniform, on the other hand, looked very sleek. His black blazer with white trimmings matched his black pants. Instead of a string, he wore something similar to a tie, except it had a flat end. His tie was black with one white stripe, indicating that he was a level one student. With his white dress shirt underneath and a badge with a sword and staff crossed etched intricately unto it, he looked dashing.

Instead of the usual tools a Conjurer may use, Elijah, instead, fashioned a black two-part band on his index and ring finger. These two bands were connected by a thin black chain, which gave him a gothic look, especially now that he recently purchased new glasses that were a bit more fashionable. He made it pretty clear to me that this would be his debut in finding a girlfriend so he took great pride in how he looked, although he always grumbled on about how no matter how much he tried, he wouldn’t be as good-looking as me.

What can I say? I need to thank mother and father for their genes.

Taking a good look at both Elijah and myself in the mirror, I could tell how much we’ve matured physically. The once nerdy Elijah from two years ago was now gone, a more sharp and cold look replacing it, which oddly contradicted from his personality.

As for myself, my eyes were a rich sapphire color that almost seemed to glow. My hair was a fiery auburn color that contrasted well with my eyes. Bluish eyes and reddish hair made me realize how coincidental it all was. What are the odds that my defining

traits aligned with the two base elements I was most adept at? My facial features were a lot softer compared to Elijah's but while soft and kind, it looked poised and elegant.

I looked and studied my face as if it wasn't my own. Even after 12 years in this body, I wasn't used to my appearance compared to the rather normal face I had in my old world.

"Are you sure you made the right choice Art? I can't believe you wanted to go in as a Scholar Mage. I thought you would for sure go in as a Battle Mage like me." Elijah said while he was styling his hair. The trim straight black hair that he had was now shorter and styled to the side.

"And I can't believe one of the main reasons you wanted to attend Xyrus as a Battle Mage student was because it had cuter girls." I slapped him firmly on the back while giving him a perverted smile.

"Shut up... Just you watch. The new and improved Elijah will get an awesome girlfriend that can only make you drool in jealousy!" He adjusts his blazer and takes one last look at himself. Obviously satisfied by his appearance, he walks towards the door while I follow, Sylv hopping on top of my head, her small claws digging into my scalp to keep grip, making me slightly worried about premature balding.

"Took you boys long enough to get ready! Who are you guys trying to impress?" My mother shakes her finger at us while Tabitha, who was in a matching apron with my mother starts giggling.

"Good morning boys, hurry up and eat. Lilia is going to be up on stage for the orientation since she's part of the student council. She must be nervous so make sure you cheer her on." Tabitha sits down across from us next to Mother and Ellie.

"I see the both of you are wearing the necklaces I gave you." I say while my mouth was still full of oatmeal and fruit.

"Yup, why wouldn't I when it's such a beautiful piece of jewelry. I wish your father had half the amount of sense as you do..." My mother sighs as she fiddles with the Phoenix Wyrms ornament.

"All my friends are jealous because of how pretty it is! Be sure to get me things like these more, okay Brother?" Ellie leans forward on her chair excitedly.

“Well, be sure to give me a reason to want to give you more things like that then.” I nag at her. My brotherly side still wishes for her to grow up into a fine lady.

“Umm... Aunt Alice, do you mind healing my face before we go to school? I don’t want my debut at school to go wrong because of these cat scratches.” He turns his gaze to Sylv who just sticks her tongue out.

“Pfft. Still fighting with Sylvie? Come here and let me take a look at that.” Mother places a hand in front of Elijah’s face and whispers a small chant before a glow started emanating from her fingertips. A few moments later, the small scratches on his face all disappeared and Elijah let out a relaxed sigh.

“Thanks, Aunt Alice.” Elijah leaned back in his chair and continued eating breakfast.

My father comes in, quite evident that he was training from the sweat he had. “Sorry I’m late for breakfast! I was in the middle of a small breakthrough!” He excitedly sat down and looked at Elijah and me. “Wow~ my two boys are already going to school. I can’t believe it. Looks like we raised Arthur well, right honey?” My father smiles broadly.

“What do you mean we? I was the one that raised him.” My mother sits up proudly.

My father scoffs, “Tch~ I guess I only raised my children when they’re getting into trouble then huh.”

“As long as you know.” My mother states matter-of-factly, causing the whole table to laugh.

The only ones missing were Vincent and Lilia. Lilia had to go to school a few days earlier since she had to do some work but Vincent has been more and more busy these days as he is part of the management committee for the ship, Dicatheous, setting sail today.

“I was pretty surprised when you said that you wanted to attend Xyrus as a Scholar Mage though, Art.” My father brings up with while chewing on his eggs.

“Yeah, both are good choices but Battle Mages are the ones that get all the glory.” Tabitha sighs. Lilia was a Battle Mage as well despite disagreements from both Tabitha and Vincent. The two of them wanted Lilia to become a Scholar Mage since it would be a lot less dangerous but Lilia was persistent on making a name for herself.

“Haha, I’ll still take some general classes on Mana Battling whenever I can to loosen my muscles but there’s not much for me to learn if it’s just fighting tactics.” I smile.

“Not much to learn from... If any of the students heard you say that, you’d get beat up... no wait, they can’t even beat you up.” Elijah just laughs at himself at the thought of the massacre the school would have if anyone picked a fight with me.

“Please control yourself to a degree Arthur, there are very influential family members attending that school. You wouldn’t want to create trouble for Tabitha’s family.” My mother chides, her face filled with worry.

“Don’t worry! I’ll be sure to only moderately beat people up!” I salute while stuffing my face with more oatmeal while Sylv steals the fruits on it. My mother just shakes her head but my father laughs when a maid walks in.

“Mr. Arthur, Mr. Elijah, the driver says that we should leave now if you guys are to make it on time for the orientation ceremony.” She says while bowing.

“Well off we go!” Elijah finishes the last bite of his ham and stuffs some greens into his mouth before standing up and straitening his black blazer.

“Mom, Ellie, before I leave, I need you guys to show me your index finger for a bit.” I stand up and walk around the table to where they were.

“Huh?” My mother looks at me, confused, but nevertheless shows me her index finger while my sister unhesitatingly follows suit. I take a quick poke at both their index fingers with my mana imbued finger, just enough for a droplet of blood to form on the tip of their fingers.

“Put the blood on the necklaces.” The seriousness in my voice makes them silently concede despite their initial surprise. The two of them places their index finger on the necklace and the blood on the tip of their fingers gets absorbed into the jewel immediately.

“These necklaces are now bound to you so only you two can wear it. It’ll protect you just in case me or Dad isn’t there but still keep yourselves safe while I’m gone okay?” I give the both of them a strong hug and my sister tears up a little bit. I hug my father and Tabitha as well, my father holding me firmly in his strong arms.

“Be good boys and don’t worry about us. Come visit whenever you can and keep in

touch!" My father and mother say before letting us off.

"Bye Brother, bye Elijah! Be safe!" My sister shouts out to us as we walk down the stairs.

"Your luggage is in the back carriage." The driver bows and opens the door for the both of us.

"Destination, Xyrus Academy!!" Elijah points his finger to upward to the sky as if making a declaration before getting inside the carriage.



The ride to Xyrus Academy wasn't too long since it was in the same City, but the campus itself was huge so going in through the main gate took some time.

There was an abundance of other extravagantly decorated carriages, some twice as long as normal carriages, with low ranked mana beasts to pull them.

"Pshh... what a bunch of show-offs." Elijah grumbled as he watched pompous looking students confidently stepping out of the carriage with decorated weapons to signify that they were either a Conjurer or Augmenter.

Our carriage was quite luxurious as well, but that was from the standpoint of commoners. Compared to those richly decorated carriages of major families, ours weren't nearly as eye-catching.

"We have arrived Master Arthur, Master Elijah." The driver opens the door for us and we step out, the both of us inhaling a deep breath of the campus air.

"Huh... the air tastes the same here... Thought it'd taste better." Elijah says while smacking his lips.

"Don't be stupid." I push my friend forward as we followed the crowd of students all walking on the marble walkway.

"Holy mother of..." Elijah's jaw drops as he looks almost vertically up at the building in front of us. The enormous white building that seemed to have words etched unto it even left me astounded.

“Let’s go in.” I snap Elijah back into sense and we walk in alongside the other new students attending this school for the first time.

Once inside, I winced by how loud it was. Thousands of excited students all chattered away, some with friends that they came with, some with people they’re meeting for the first time.

“LET’S FIND A SEAT!” I need to shout for Elijah, who was right next to me, to hear. Eventually, we found a seat in the middle of the auditorium near the back rows.

Looking around more carefully, I was surprised at how many dwarves and elves I see seated, chatting away with those around them.

“Wow, I’ve never seen full elves before until now. Looks like it’s true that all three races can fully attend this Academy now.” Elijah excitedly looks around, scouting for potential soul mates amongst the crowd. I can’t help but shake my head at the expected behavior, when I can only see these students as little kids.”

Getting bored of looking around me, I focus my attention on the stage where it was still empty except for a single podium. Suddenly, a sharp blur focuses into form and I see Director Goodsky standing behind the podium. She wasn’t wearing the oversized hat that Conjurers wear like she did the last time we met almost 4 years ago, but instead, she wore an elegant white circlet that matched her white robe. She had her eyes closed but when she opened them, she was looking straight at me, which sent shivers down my back. Smiling, she raised her hand slowly while her eyes were still locked onto mine.

By this time, many more of the incoming first years noticed her and began talking even louder, some cheering, but when Director Goodsky’s hand reached where her head was, suddenly, everything went dead silent.

Looking around, everyone had looks of surprise and while everyone’s lips were moving, no sound was heard from anyone in the audience.

“Excuse me for my rudeness but I do hate speaking up. Not good for my throat, no it is not.” She says in a pleasant voice that, while soft, was heard perfectly clear even from here in the back row.

“I welcome everyone here, the future leaders, scholars and powerhouses of Dicathen to this humble Academy. I am Cynthia Goodsky, please call me Director Goodsky and

do not be afraid to say hello when I walk around campus. I am no good with speeches so I stand here before you mages today to say hello and introduce to you the Student Council that represent this Academy and take part I making important decisions along with me. Please give them a warm welcome.” She waves her hand that was raised up and one by one, members of the council start walking out.

I first see Jarrod walking confidently, looking straight ahead, his pretty boy face seems initiated a wave of shrill screams from the girls in the audience. Behind him, a very playful, cheery guy comes out while he waves at the audience, beaming us a bright smile.

“Look look! There’s Lilia! We need to cheer!” Elijah stands up and shouts at the top of his lungs and I follow him, yelling her name as well. Her shy demeanor was nowhere to be seen as she walked calmly towards the center of the stage, where she gave small bows. There was no way she could see us or hear our individual cheers but we still gave it our all to cheer our friend up.

Behind her walked out a tall student with long bangs that parted in a 2:8 ratio. He had a very serious face and the way he held himself up reeked of an all-mighty attitude. All that was missing was glasses, but he didn’t wear any, his eyes looked even sharper than Elijah’s but in a cold, quiet sort of way, he was attractive, starting another wave of cheers from the excited girls in the crowd around us.

Finally, the last to arrive actually made the crowd silent. The unmistakable gunmetal silver hair that reflected the lights in the auditorium gave her a serene glow as her peachy crème complexion made the boys around me gape. She turned to face the audience so that her round, turquoise eyes captured the hearts of every boy in this auditorium.

She was only 13... right?

I had a hard time believing the girl I couldn’t see as more than a kid matured enough to make me gulp. She still had an immature face that couldn’t be hidden no matter how beautiful she may be in comparison to everyone else, but just imagining the potential she had made me shake my head.

While still a little taller than Lilia, she was quite a bit shorter than the serious-looking guy next to her but her posture made her seem bigger and grander than everyone else on the stage. Taking a deep bow, she comes back up while tucking a side of her hair

behind her pointed ears, her face emotionless as if she were a doll.

“My name is Tessia Eralith and I am honored to stand here as this Academy’s Student Council President.”

Chapter 44

You Dare?

The incoming students of all three races that were cheering for each of the Student Council members fell silent when Tess walked in. With her gunmetal silver hair swaying behind her as each of her dignified steps echoed throughout the silent auditorium, she single-handedly changed the atmosphere inside this entire building.

As she bowed and tucked her hair behind her ear, a roar of applause erupted as both males and females alike cheered from admiration. I thought the cheers would last a lot longer but as soon as Tess started speaking, it was as if each of the students in the crowd covered each other's mouth so that they can hear her voice.

"My name is Tessia Eralith and I am honored to stand here as this Academy's Student Council President."

Murmurs started after the crowd once again cheered for our beautiful president. Next to me was a scrawny human boy that was talking to his friend on the other side.

"THAT'S the Princess Eralith I was talking about. My older brother that goes here told me she became a direct disciple under the Director and she's been on campus since last year and will start formally attending this year with us!" He leaned in to his friend so only he could hear but the volume he spoke betrayed him.

"T-that means she's the first non-human to set foot on this campus. Wait... she's only a first year and she's already the Student Council President? Is that even possible?" His friend, whom I couldn't really see, spoke louder and louder with each word, the neighboring students hearing it as well.

"Yeah I heard of her as well! She's supposedly a super-genius of some sort right?"

"Why the hell is she so damn beautiful if she's also talented as well? This isn't even fair..."

"I wonder what I would have to give to get her to even look at me?"

The audience was filled with different talks about Tessia but while for the males it revolved around how much of an unobtainable star she was, for the females, it was a mixture of admiration and envy. Sylv was going crazy on top of my head as she recognized Tess down on stage.

“Kyuu~” ‘Papa! That’s Mama! She’s down there! Let’s go say hi!’ Sylv was jumping up and down so I picked her up and wrapped my arms around her.

‘Who’s your Mama!’ I couldn’t help but sigh in defeat at her excitement. Tess became pretty close to Sylv a bit after hatching so I can see why she’s so fond of her... but mama?

“Woah...” Elijah, who I stopped paying attention to firmly gripped my arm with both of his hands as if he needed me to support him from fainting.

“Woah...” Repeated Elijah. For how smart he looks, he sure acts like an idiot at times like these.

“You okay there, Elijah?” I lightly nudge his head but his head just bounces like a bobble head toy.

“...Art... I think I’m in love.” His hands that were firmly gripping my arm suddenly intertwined with my arm as he linked arms with me, imagining me as Tessia.

Okay this is getting out of hand. I tell Sylvie to attack and she promptly locks her jaw on the top of Elijah’s head as he starts screaming from more surprise than pain.

“Oh sorry...” With Sylv still dangling on the crown of his head, Elijah lets go of my arm and starts focusing on the stage below again.

As the crowd settled down enough for Tessia to start speaking again, Director Goodsky silently disappeared.

Tessia spoke eloquently enough to even surprise me. She was only 13, yet she had the ability to draw the crowd’s full attention with her unadorned words filled with maturity. She spoke about the principles of this Academy, how this is a holy ground where students should feel safe to walk freely around. Tessia emphasized the discipline one would face if anyone hurt another student outside of a consented duel.

“While I may be a first year as all of you are, having given the privilege to be inside the

academy a year longer made it all too apparent to me that there is a deeply embedded discrimination against the Scholar mage students by the Battle mage students. I for one will not tolerate any sort of aggression or bullying based on the fact that one is a Scholar Mage student.” Tessia’s voice never wavered as she stood behind the podium.

The crowd grew a little noisy at this statement, as everyone present knows all too well some of the hardships one may face if they are a Scholar Mage student.

“Starting this year, while uniforms and the upper courses required may be different, for the first two years, general education, that contains the mixture of both Scholar Mage classes and Battle Mage classes will be mandatory for better assimilation between the two different types of students. After the two years is up, one may choose to switch their education specialization by taking a test, although it is a quite difficult one.” This last statement drew in dissatisfied complains from amongst the students in the crowd. While both Elijah and I didn’t have to take a test due to my special connection with Director Goodsky, all students, regardless of background had to test for either a Scholar Mage or Battle mage position.

To get in as a Scholar Mage, an incoming student only needs a basic foundation in magic, which is mana gathering. While they had to take a written exam to test their mental acuteness, the practical portion of the exam was much more simple. Battle Mage students, however, had a much stricter practical exam, actually performing basic spells or techniques depending on whether they were a Conjurer or Augmenter. It may seem like a cakewalk for someone like Elijah, Tess, or me, I’ll admit it could be quite a bit of challenge for someone who just awakened.

The tall stern looking fellow stepped up next, silencing the crowd with a wave of his hand.

“My name is Clive Graves and I am your Student Vice President. Continuing on from what the President said, this year contains many changes. Along with the assimilation and freedom to move between the two student types, there will also be no limit on how long a student can attend this academy. While in the past, the professors here pushed students to graduate after 4 years, it is becoming more and more apparent that many graduate’s capability as a mage is becoming less than satisfactory. Therefore, the Director has declared that instead of a time limit on graduating, in order to graduate from Xyrus Academy, one needs to fulfill a list of requirements and pass the graduation exam. While the conditions to graduate have become many folds harder, the time limit to graduate has increased to 10 years. In that time, we fervently

hope to produce top class mages in both the theoretical and combat fields. We welcome everyone here, humans, elves and dwarves alike to this Academy.” Clive bows, the rest of the Student Council following him.

The last part of the announcement wasn’t exactly news for any of us. It was announced quite recently though, which made me think that it had something to do with the new Continent. Was this Academy being used to produce higher quality mages in case of a future battle against the new Continent?

“That’s the firstborn son of the famous Graves family! Make sure not to get on his bad side.” Again the boy next to me whispers in a pointlessly loud volume.

After finishing up the ceremony, all the new students were dismissed to their dorms. Filing out of the auditorium, my eyes unconsciously looked for Tess but she was nowhere in sight. Outside, the trees that arched over the marble walkways produce small showers of leaves of fall colors. The students were all excitedly chatting amongst their peers, getting to know new people. Walking deeper within the campus to where the dorms were, I see female students passing by Elijah and I, taking a double take back at us and giggling with their friends.

“Sigh... I feel like I become significantly less better looking when I’m next to you.” Elijah’s shoulders hunch as we walk along side-by-side, Sylv pitifully patting Elijah’s head from on top of mine.

“Well, even if most come after me, some of the girls will have to eventually settle for you right buddy?” I tease, giving him a playful wink.

“Screw you.” He hits me on the stomach as the both of us laugh.

BOOM

The loud explosion surprises the both of us as well as the students walking around us. We rushed towards the commotion at the end of the marble walkway.

“I don’t see how a short-ass dwarf like you can hope to be a proper Augmenter. Why don’t you stick to forging some weapons for real warriors like me?”

“What da hell didja say? Who do ya think ya are anyway?”

I stop running when I realize what’s going on a still pretty good distance away, shaking

my head. It was just a stupid brawl about to happen between two students. The explosion was made from the human hitting his fist on the nearby tree with mana.

“Couldn’t this become dangerous?” Elijah looks around where some of the students had to deliberately walk around the two of them just in case they start fighting. We were amongst the last to leave the auditorium so most are already deeper within the campus or inside their dorms, so there weren’t many people but if they do start fighting, some students in the vicinity may get caught up in this mess.

“They wouldn’t dare do something like fighting on the first day right? Let’s just go.” I try to nudge my friend to a roundabout route avoiding the two arguing students.

“Come on, we have nothing to do besides unpack anyway! Let’s just see how good they are. Look, the human looks to be a level two Augmenter.” He points at the brawny human.

Looking at them, both the dwarf and human student had Battle Mage uniforms, but the human had two stripes on his tie while the dwarf had only one.

“My name is Nicolas Drey! Declare the duel short-ass so we can start! Or are you all bark no bite?” The human smirks, placing his right hand on the badge pinned to his left breast.

“Tch! Yer gonna be sorry.” The dwarf that looked around 150cm with a bulky build looked awkward wearing the blazer uniform but the way he carried his giant battle-axe with ease tells me he’s more than what the single stripe on his tie tells us.

The metal badge on both the human and dwarf glows brightly as the dwarf starts chanting after placing his hand on his badge as well. “I declare a duel between me, Broznean Boor and Nicolas Drey!”

“I accept the duel!” The two badges glow and different colors until it syncs together and produces a loud ‘ping’ sound.

The badge on the Battle Mage uniform and the pocket watch on the Scholar Mage uniform act as an artifact for the dueling system, creating a layer of barrier around the user that can take a certain amount of force. When the barrier breaks, the duel is considered over and the other party the winner. It takes around 24 hours for the artifact to charge another barrier where, during that time, dueling is not allowed. Mages of a higher level aren’t allowed to issue a duel with lower levels to keep it fair,

which is why the human had to taunt the dwarf to start the duel.

The human mage takes out dual swords from his dimension ring and gets into a stance as the people around start backing up to avoid getting caught up in the fight.

“Go dwarf!” Elijah starts cheering himself in favor of Broznean, getting dirty looks in the process.

I study the two Augmenters and see that the level two human is a red core stage mage while the dwarf is still a black stage. This should be interesting.

“HAAP!” The human student roars as his two broadswords glow a dim yellow color and the earth surrounding him starts trembling.

“JAH!” The dwarf leaps up and propels himself forward by pushing off of a nearby tree, charging his battle-axe as well with earth attribute mana.

“Ooh! Both are Earth Attribute Augmenters Art!” Elijah gets more excited as leans closer towards the fight as Sylv is asleep on my head.

“Tremor Smash!” The dwarf shouts, placing his left palm on the head of his axe, making the dull glow condense.

BOOM

The power of the blow from the dwarf forces the human to skid back even as he blocked with both his swords. I could see both his arms shaking as he grimaces.

The human boy lowers his two swords and dashes towards the dwarf who was already in a defensive stance. The dual swords scrape along the ground and as he swings up after getting into range, a trail of earth follows along, creating a blade of earth after his blade.

Not bad. While it wasn’t surprising that the dwarf could already use his earth attribute element, it surprised me that a human on the red stage could already augment his earth attribute to that degree. He was talented in that sense.

“Shatter!” The dwarf’s body glows yellow and he stomps his right foot hard unto the ground, creating a ripple around him as the earth blade that was coming towards him falls down in fragments. The dwarf blocks the human’s two actual blades with his axe

but gets a little scrape on his arm from the upward swing.

“Earth Pillar!” Following the upward swipe, he stomps hard with his leading foot directly in front of the dwarf creating a pretty fragile column of rock from the ground that hits the dwarf squarely on the stomach.

“Oof!” The dwarf’s body lifts into the air from the force of the blow and his shield breaks with loud shattering sound, signaling that the duel is over.

Cheers go off from the humans that gathered but the dwarves amongst the audience groan in embarrassment.

Elijah just sighs and starts to leave but before I follow him, I see the slight smirk on the human’s face as he once again imbues mana into his two blades.

That fool wasn’t planning on finishing it with that. He was going for the final blow.

If I were to use a long-range technique, that’ll create even more problems but if I go there and directly interfere, everyone would know it would be me.

Gah! Why couldn’t Elijah see that the human was going to cast another technique? If Elijah interfered with a spell, it would be more natural since he’s a Conjurer.

There was this way too. Sorry Tess.

“IS THAT THE STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT I SEE COMING OVER?” I deliberately yell louder so that the human boy that won the duel would be startled.

Just like I anticipated, he clicks his tongue and puts his swords back into his dimension ring, jerking his eyes around to find the President.

The crowd that was talking amongst their friends, analyzing the duel all started looking around for Tessia.

“Where’s the Student Council President?” Elijah stretches his neck above the crowd to look for her.

“Oops! I must’ve been mistaken!” I just shrug my shoulders and turn to walk past when a hand firmly grasps my shoulder.

“Are you picking a fight with me or something brat?” It was the human that was just dueling, Nick or Nicole or whatever.

“Yeah! What the hell man! Getting us excited for nothing!” I see some of the humans evidently disappointed at not being able to see their idol in person.

“I thought I saw her. Once again, my bad.” I use my hand to peel his hands off of my shoulder, giving him a wink.

“Yeah, your bad.” He snatches his hand away before he walks away, spitting on the ground in front of my feet.

“You know, a good advice if you want to graduate... I don’t think killing that dwarf boy would’ve done you any good.” I stand still as Sylv spits directly at the back of his neck.

He instantly whirls back around with his two swords in his hands once again. I can almost see a vein bulging out of his forehead like it would in a cartoon.

“Pfft.” Oops, I shouldn’t laugh in this situation. I take a quick glance and see that Elijah is just shaking his head, knowing it’s too late.

“YOU DARE??” The thirteen-year-old boy with swords too big for his immature body dash towards me in a manner I find clumsy, preparing to cross chop with his two blades, his face bright red in anger.

I lift an eyebrow as I lift one hand up to stop the blow. Why make myself look foolish? Just as I prepare to shatter his two swords, a voice stops him straight in his tracks. It was the voice that all of the new students heard not too long ago and the voice probably every male fell in love with. It was also the voice of my childhood friend.

“Do YOU dare?”

Chapter 45

Not Quite As Planned

I can see the face of the dual-wielding boy visibly pale as he freezes at the unmistakable voice. I turn to see that the whole Student Council was walking towards us through a gap created by the students to make way.

Taking calm but hurried strides in the front was Tess, her doll-like face expressionless. Behind her, I spotted Lilia giving me a worried look.

My attacker immediately recalls his two blades into his dimension ring and gives a respectful bow towards them, sweat beading down his forehead.

“What is going on, Arthur?” Jarrod is the one that speaks up, making everyone in the crowd raise an eyebrow in surprise.

“Looks like the Scholar Mage knows someone from the Student Council.” “No wonder he was acting so cocky just now.” “Pfft. Did you see him raise up his arm like he was going to stop the attack with his bare hands?” Whispers were heard from the crowd making me roll my eyes. The immaturity level of some of these brats continues to astound me. Even for 12-year-olds, you would think that children from such influential families would be taught some manners.

“Nah, nothing much happened, although you should go take a look at that dwarf student lying over there, Boznean I think that was his name.” I point over to the tree where the dwarf was still groaning while clutching his stomach.

Elijah walks towards me hoping to distill the situation. “Hi Lilia. Sorry, we ended up getting caught up in this little scuffle after the duel between them ended. No harm done!” He gives a slight wave at her as he starts talking while directing his words at Tessia, who still wore a mask of apathy.

“Still, this student was about to attack you when a duel wasn’t even issued. This is a serious offense.” Lilia stepped up, her gaze a bit sterner as she jotted something on a notebook she carried around.

While Lilia, Jarrod, and Elijah were talking about what exactly happened, I felt Tessia's strong gaze piercing through me, as if she was expecting me to do something. Honestly, even with an extended life experience, I have no confidence in what to do when it comes to these situations.

Did she want me to treat her respectfully as the Student Council President? Did she want me to treat her as a childhood friend? Did she want to keep our past relationship a secret as a whole?

'It's Mama!' Sylv 'kyu'd' on top of my head and I had to firmly tell her to stay on my head and not go to her.

Meanwhile, the crowd was getting more and more rowdy, the males doing the best they can to get a better look at Tessia, hoping to engrain her image into their memories to use in times of loneliness or longing.

"You. I believed I asked you a question. Do you dare?" She takes a step forward, her eyes boring down on the second year student. I was thinking that the student was technically a level higher than Tess, but when I took a look at the ribbon that was tied neatly underneath her collar, it had two stripes as well.

"N-no. Of course I would never dare break the rules like that. Please forgive my earlier actions. I think I was a bit too hotheaded." He bowed even lower to the point that I felt like he was shrinking.

"Leave." Her eyes continue to look down at him as he shuffles himself a good distance away before he turns around and runs out of sight, a few of the boys in the crowd following after him. Figures.

"And you! Why are you starting a fight with a senior on the first day of school? You should know your place! No matter how rowdy he may have been, he is still your senior and he did not break the rules when dueling with the other student. Furthermore, he is a Battle Mage student while you are a Scholar Mage student. Did you not pay attention to my speech about discrimination between the two sects of students here? Yet, you still chose to interfere, making these types of problems apparent on the first day?" She crosses her arms even tighter as she looks directly at me. Her face was a bit flushed in embarrassment but she took it too far with this.

"HAA?" I couldn't help but let out an annoyed sound of surprise by her statement.

I take a step forward this time and I can see Elijah's eyes widen as he realized I was going to go past the point of no return.

"You just got here without even knowing what was going on besides him charging at me with two weapons and you want to lecture me?" I take another step forward and I can see Tessia's once haughty face starting to crumble.

"He was about to seriously injure or even kill that dwarf lying down right now after the duel system broke. If I hadn't stopped that arrogant brat, you would've had to deal with a murder case, not an unregulated fight between two students." I was within arm's length distance of her and I was the one looking down on her at this time. What a lovely reunion.

"I SINCERELY apologize for the trouble I've caused. Good day!" I emphasize mockingly, even throwing in a sarcastic bow, stunning everyone, including Tessia.

So much for maturity... She was still just a thirteen-year-old little girl. What was I even expecting? I shake my head as I turn around in the direction of my dorms, Elijah following after, bowing to student council, all of whom were still dumbfounded.

"Hold it student. Were you raised in a cave? Are these the manners your mother taught you while growing up? Do you even know who she is?" It was Clive Graves who regained his senses first and ran towards me, grabbing me by the arm, trying to spin me back around.

Holding firm, I stop walking and turn my head towards him. He kind of pissed me off from the start and I knew he wasn't the type I would get along with. Was I raised in a cave? Is he seriously talking trash about Alice right now?

"Let go." The malice in my voice frightened even Elijah as he instinctively took a step back while Clive immediately let go of my arm and even guarded himself with mana.

I take a quick glance at Tessia and realize she fell down as her knees gave out. I just continued walking towards the dorm, Elijah following behind me as the both of us hears mutters explode behind us.

"Ahh! President Tessia, please get back up."

"Who the hell was that? I think Treasurer Jarrod called him Arthur right?"

“Oh man he is so screwed. He just told off the Student President of the Academy.”

Elijah took a few hurried steps to catch up to me, eventually walking by my side. “You know what you just did right? Man, you sure love attracting trouble don’t you. First the dungeon and now this?” He shakes his head but continues to follow me as if assuring me nonverbally that he’d be by my side.

Pfft, if only they knew Tess and my relationship. Gah! Maybe I was a bit too harsh on her. She’s just a prepubescent girl. I shouldn’t get irritated because she just acted like one right? I guess I was expecting too much from her.

Well... I’ll just let nature take its course. School should at least be this exciting right? I wasn’t really mad at her, but I was just annoyed at that moment. I should reconcile with her before it gets too awkward but I get the feeling that the timing is going to be an issue.

Elijah and I manage to make it to our dorm building without further trouble. There were two male dorms and two female dorms within the Academy. The two male and female dorms were separated by underclassmen and upperclassmen. Underclassmen were students that were still taking their general education classes. Students are moved into the Upperclassmen dorms after they’ve finished their general education courses and have formally decided on what type of student they were going to be.

The underclassmen dorms were simple to say the least. It was clean and well-kept but there were no fancy furniture or decorations on the wall. It was a warm beige colored interior with stairs that went all the way up to the top floor, where each floor had a hallway filled with rooms.

“Room 394. We’re here!” Elijah unlocks the door by placing his palm on a round stone above the handle. It looks like a simple artifact used to read basic mana signatures.

The room wasn’t nearly as fancy as the one in the Helstea Manor but it was still very homey. Walking in, to our right were two closets and two our left, a decent sized bathroom with two sinks a shower and a separate toilet room so I could still wash my face in the sink while Elijah takes a crap. The shower was made from stained glass so while the silhouette may be visible, you wouldn’t be able to see much.

A couple steps in were two beds side by side separated by a nightstand placed against the left side of the wall while on the right side was a long drawer for folded clothes.

The sleeping area and the studying area was separated by a wall that came up to our waist, with three stairs leading to where the desks and couches were. The two desks were placed against opposite of each other so we would be seated facing away with a long couch positioned against the miniature wall separating the desks from the beds. The far side of the wall was made almost entirely of glass, which instantly attracted me towards it. The view encompassed a big portion of the campus, which was currently a canvas of fall colors. Looking at it from here, I would have no idea that this place was an institute of mages without being told that.

I took a seat on the couch, somewhat excited about the days to come, Sylv still leaning against the window, looking out at the view.

“Ahh! We didn’t even have dinner yet but I’m already pooped! I wonder whose fault that is?” Elijah jumps on the far bed that was right behind the couch, already claiming that as his own.

I shrink back into the couch, getting comfortable as I spotted the multiple luggage cases that were brought in by our driver beforehand.

TESSIA ERALITH’S POV:

GAAHHHHHH! I screwed up. I screwed up. I screwed up. I TOTALLY screwed up! I buried my head into my pillow and screamed my lungs out in frustration.

“MMMMMMFFFFFFFFFPPPHHH!!” We were supposed to have an emotional, romantic reunion! Well... It was emotional, but in the complete opposite direction! Why did I even say all of that anyway? Why did I lash out at him? I know Art would never pick a fight without a reason but I just went and told him off on something I didn’t even see! Gah!! I’m so stupid!

I bet he hates me now...

Why did I say that!!! I even brought up my speech! Bahhh! I must’ve sounded so arrogant! But still, we were in a crowd like that and he did have some fault in the commotion. B-but...

I’m sure he hates me now...

If Art just greeted me or even just talked to me normally, I wouldn't have said that! That's right! It's all Art's fault! He even ignored me when I came all the way there to help settle the mess he was in! He didn't even say hi! I wasn't expecting a full-blown hug or even a k-k-kiss or something! Just a 'long time no see Tess,' would've been fine! Who was that black haired guy that reminds me of a raven anyway? Is he his friend? Best friend? It seemed like the both of them knew Lilia and Jarrod! Gahh!!!! This is so frustrating!!!

I scream into my pillow again in hopes to release some of my frustration.
"MMMMMMFFFFFFF!!!!"

Knock *Knock*

"This is Clive... I'm here to check up on you. Are you feeling okay?" I hear the muffled voice through the door.

"Ahem." I quietly clear my throat before I respond.

"I'm fine, thank you." I use my 'public' voice, as I call it, which makes me sound much colder.

"Who was that brat anyway? I can't believe he dared lecture you like that when you were trying to give him advice! Should I talk to the director about this? We could get him punished and..."

"It's fine so leave. Don't go to the Director either... that's an order." I speak harsher than I usually do to get the point across. How dare he badmouths Art. Only I can badmouth him.

I fall back unto my pillow after I hear the faint sound of his footsteps leaving. Dorms were separated by gender and class while before it was separated by the type of student you were. For the Student Councils though, we each had our own room in a building that was right next to the Director's office. It's uncomfortable living with guys in the same house but Lilia is here and the guys are generally okay so I don't mind too much.

Stupid Arthur. Did you know how much I wanted to scream out your name and run to you when I saw you in the audience? Even if he was far away, how could I ever miss that bright auburn hair with a mana beast resting on top of his head! Sylv looks really different from when she first hatched but that didn't surprise me. The fact that she

was a dragon was something that should shock me but with Art, nothing he ever did could surprise me... he was just like that.

“Haaa...” I didn’t even have the energy to scream in frustration anymore. I wanted to blame Art for all of this but I know he wasn’t all at fault. He probably wanted to keep our relationship a secret for me since I’m a public figure here. But still... Art really doesn’t get the female mind very well. Dummy...

I hope he doesn’t hate me...

There were so many questions I wanted to ask him too. What has he been doing? How was his time as an Adventurer? Did he get hurt anywhere? Did he miss me? Did he think of me at all these past four years?

I wanted to brag to him how much stronger I’ve gotten too... After directly training under the Director, my skills as a Conjurer improved by leaps and bounds. Training under Grandpa wasn’t the best idea because he was an Augmenter, which limited what he could teach me. He taught me the basics of mana manipulation but as far as going into the route of a Conjurer, the Director knew a lot more. She was also familiar with the differences in elves and humans, which helped her train me.

Grandpa knew I had great potential because when I first awakened, I created an implosion that blew up my entire room and part of the downstairs kitchen. That was back when Art used to live with us. That was when I had to wake him up every day too.

Sniff

Oh no. I shouldn’t start crying. Art wouldn’t hate me just for that would he? I should just clear things up with him and apologize. He wouldn’t ignore me right?

Ugh... I’m scared.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

Sylv was taking a nap next to me on the couch, her tiny body heaving up and down with each breath.

“It’s not like you to explode like that all of a sudden though Art. You would more likely

just ignore her and walk off right?” Elijah was still lying down in his bed, his hand supporting his head up as he was facing me.

“Well, I admit I shouldn’t have exploded but I couldn’t help...”

Knock *Knock*

We both turned our heads to the door after being interrupted.

“That’s strange, who would want to see us on the first day? Maybe our neighbors are just saying hello?” Elijah gets up to answer the door.

“Who is...” After a brief silence, I turn to see Elijah frozen still. Getting up to see what was going on, I see Director Goodsky nonchalantly at the door, smiling at me.

“Good evening Arthur. Elijah. May I come in?”

Chapter 46

Wiser Than The Wise

“D-D-Director Goodsky! I-it’s an honor to meet you in person.” Elijah gives a forceful bow that looked almost comedic towards the ever-graceful Cynthia Goodsky.

He lifted his head back up too quickly, almost dropping his glasses in the process while the Director gave a polite smile, the crow’s feet around her eyes adding more charm.

“Please come in Director Goodsky. Elijah, stop blocking the doorway.” I pull out the chair from my desk, motioning for the Director to take a seat on the sofa.

“I told you to call me Cynthia.” She gives a pouting face as she almost floats past Elijah and takes a seat on the couch, the door closing on its own. The amount of harmony she has with the wind element continues to amaze me as the air around her almost seem to bend to her will without even a command.

“I don’t think it would be wise of a twelve year old with no background to be on a first name basis with the Director of the most prestigious academy in this Continent.” I chuckle as I take a seat on my desk chair as well as she sits cross-legged, her back kept straight and proper.

“My... your bond has changed a lot in appearance since the last time I met. Intriguing.” Cynthia tries to hold Sylv, who was curled on the couch, but she hops out of her reach and nestles herself on top of my head.

“Haha, as shy as before I see.” She gives Sylvie one last studying look before she starts staring at me. “Hmmm... how peculiar. I seem to only sense your wind and earth attribute mana inside of you. Are you, by chance, using a seal?” She tilts her head to the side while Elijah was standing ramrod straight behind her, as if he was in front of his commanding officer in war.

I lifted my left arm to reveal my bracelet with two charms dangling on it to answer her question.

“Can’t say I’m not disappointed. I was hoping to go around flaunting you as my little

protégé but I guess even a dual elemental augments is rare enough to do so. But you becoming a Scholar Mage student was something that I definitely expected.” She gave a soft chuckle.

“I was planning on taking a visit to your office to update you on some things but it saves me the trouble by you coming here I guess. I’ve probably made an enemy from a not so friendly family while I was an Adventurer so I don’t want to give anyone any reasons for him to suspect me, at least not right now.” I lean back in my chair as I studied the two charms on my bracelet.

“Yes, I’ve read the reports on the case between Adventurer Note, and Adventurer Lucas Wykes. Quite a troublesome foe you’ve managed to pick up. While I do have a certain amount of authority over his family, as they are a military house, they have too many hidden workings that continue to elude us.” Director Cynthia was rubbing her chin, thinking of a solution.

“It’s fine. I don’t consider that an urgent matter. He’s just a piece of trash I’ll have to pick up someday. If I do something rash now and it goes back to my friends and family, THAT’S when it would be a problem. I would like your help with another matter.” I put my elbows on my knees as I lean forward towards Director Cynthia.

“Please speak.” She kindly replied.

“I want to take higher level mana theory classes, especially those on deviants.” I state simply.

“Hmm... That wouldn’t be too difficult to do, but Arthur, wasn’t one of your main reasons for attending this academy to fit in with your peers?” She eyed me in a studying manner.

“I don’t mind taking these extra classes on top of my normal ones, where I would be with students my age. I’m just impatient to learn a bit more about deviant mana manipulation since I’ve hit a ceiling on that recently.” I almost blurted out saying, ‘since there was no deviation magic in my old world.’

“Fine. I can make that happen, and I can even give you a pass to permit you to observe the upper class top mages mock battle as well in their practices.” She sounded magnanimous but I only eyed her suspiciously.

“Okay... So what’s the catch?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Arthur! I’m heartbroken! I only wanted to do this for your growth!” She over exaggerated her act as she placed both hands on top of her heart as if struck by an arrow.

“Art! You’re being rude to the Director!” Elijah looked a little panicked, as he couldn’t see the Director’s facial expression as she did this.

I didn’t say anything, only staring at her to get an answer.

“Sigh... Very well. Of course I would like some sort of ‘reward’ for doing these favors for you.” She finally caved in, baffling Elijah.

“I hope you don’t say something absurd like joining the student council.” I shake my head. These situations seemed like it called for that type of response.

“Pfft! I heard of your little bout with the Princess earlier.” She starts laughing, as my face turns a bit red in embarrassment.

“I didn’t expect the ever calm and composed Arthur Leywin to explode like that. I guess Princess Eralith is a bit special?” She was still snickering at my embarrassment.

“Wait what does she mean by that Art?” Elijah walked towards us so he could see the both of us now, although he remained standing out of respect towards Cynthia.

Before the Director answered, she looked to me to see if I was okay with it. After giving her an unconcerned shrug, she tells Elijah. “Your best friend is also happens to be the childhood friend of the Student Council President that every male student seems to be enamored with.” The Director gives a sly grin, as if she was just a teenager that was telling some rich gossip.

I was a little worried that Elijah’s jaw might unhinge by how much his face slacked. I could see a mixture of emotions, from shock to betrayal to envy all in his face.

“How? When? What??” He couldn’t produce complete sentences as he was still trying to wrap his head around the whole situation.

Ignoring him, I turned back to Cynthia. “How did you find out anyway? I’m not surprised that you know but shouldn’t be something you could just stumble upon either.” I asked, curious.

“Haha~ about that. Virion Eralith happens to be an old acquaintance of mine. I didn’t tell anyone else, but I did excitedly mention to him that my academy would be receiving a gifted quadra-elemental mage in a couple of years. Him and I were quite competitive from way back then, but he took the news quite calmly, which made me suspicious. However, I didn’t find out until I took in his granddaughter as my disciple. Do you know the first thing she said when I took her in?” She was trying to hold in her laughter.

I just shook my head in defeat, my face becoming even a deeper shade of red.

“When is Arthur Leywin going to start attending this school?” Director Cynthia said, purposely making her voice sound more like Tess’. For how grand and mysterious she might seem to everyone else, was here laughing like a preteen, taking joy in my embarrassment.

“What? Art! How do you know her!?” Elijah practically wanted to choke the answers out of me but I could tell he was holding it in since the Director was still here, although she probably wouldn’t have cared.

“Eventually, I pieced the two and two together. Really... Being trained by Virion, I feel somewhat betrayed Arthur.” She put on a pouting face again, making me roll my eyes.

By this time, Elijah just sinks into his desk chair, giving up, done with life.

“I don’t mean to intrude in on your love life but she thinks very highly of you Arthur. I’m sure she didn’t mean to come across as the way she did earlier. My training regimen is not easy and the few that have tried have failed. The reason she was able to keep up and continue to train under me is to catch up to you Arthur. Even you know that you acted quite immaturely there.” She does a complete 180 as she puts on a motherly vibe now, confusing me.

“Yeah. I know how dumb I acted there as well, no need to remind me.” I sigh, leaning further back into my seat.

“You will make up with her soon right? I’d hate to see my disciple disheartened while she trains.” She smiles at me gently before continuing. “What I want from you is not to be in the student council, but actually a committee that is going to start this year. The Disciplinary Committee.”

I knew she wanted me to do something like this. “Forget it. I don’t need the theory

classes. I'll just teach myself from the books in the library." I shake my head.

"The books on deviants aren't accessible to underclassmen and even for upperclassmen, you need to show that you are a deviant, something that you can't do right now right?" She calmly refutes my plans.

"Being part of this disciplinary committee or whatever... how does that make sense? I'm a new student that's in this academy as a Scholar Mage student, what would the other members think anyway?" I try to reason.

"While they might not agree at first, with some time, I believe you will be more than capable of changing their minds, even with your self-placed handicap." Director Goodsky throws in a playful wink, dead set on going through with this.

"Arthur, unlike the Student Council members that are chosen on a broader criteria, the Disciplinary Committee is strictly based on strength. Your responsibilities won't nearly be as much as the Student Council and being in the Disciplinary Committee gives you the chance to work with students, some of which are also deviants, that are all strong in their own fields." Her arguments were getting stronger.

"You mentioned that the Disciplinary Committee members are based on strength..." Before I finish my sentence, she cuts me off.

"No, Lucas Wykes will not be on the Disciplinary Committee if that is what you are curious about. Arthur, this opportunity is something that other students would take as an honor. I insist on you taking it." She leans in, her face a bit more serious now.

"..." My head is bent down as I think things over. On top of regular and extra classes, I would have to do committee work, putting a big strain on my individual training time, all of which I would have no idea where and when to do it.

As if she read my mind, she threw out her final offer. "Since the amount of work may be a bit too much, on top of self-practice at who knows where, how about I offer you access to a private training facility where you wouldn't need to worry about anyone intruding." She points at my bracelet.

"Please, Arthur, I really feel like this could be a good deal for the both of us in the long run." Her face softens a bit as she sows sincerity.

I start thinking of how being in the Disciplinary Committee would fit into my plans

and finding no particular detriment in agreeing to this, I answer. "Fine, I'll agree to be a part of the Disciplinary Committee." My shoulder loosens as I let out a sigh.

"Good! Since classes start tomorrow, I will give your new schedule to your first period professor. Here is your new uniform I prepared in the case of good news. The knife is just meant to be the symbol of the Disciplinary Committee, but it is quite expensive so do take care not to lose it." She gives me a wink as she throws me a uniform fitted for me with a sheathed knife and strap. It irritated me that she already had this prepared when she came in, even if it was just in case.

It dawned on me that even with my previous life and this life put together, both Grandpa Virion and Director Goodsky would still be older than me; after all, I only lived until the age of late thirties, around where it was getting past prime as a duelist. I've been so caught up in the fact that I had two lives that it didn't occur to me that there are still people here that are older. Of course I still had the advantage from traditional mages here because where I came from, the 'magic' usage was a lot more advanced.

The advantage that the older mages from this world would have, however, would be that they're used to the amount of mana in the atmosphere here and have mastered it to a certain degree.

I guess even with two lives, there was still bound to be someone wiser than you.

I involuntarily shake my head from my thoughts, which causes Director Goodsky to tilt her head in curiosity.

"Now that the matter I've come to settle are settled, I shall take my leave! Enjoy your first dinner here and do please patch things up with my dear Tessia as fast as you can. I don't want my precious disciple to keep moping." She wisps away, leaving me wondering why she didn't just enter here like that. It was probably to respect our privacy or something.

As soon as Director Goodsky leaves, I see a shadow loom over me as Elijah is looking down at me, his facial expression akin to a demon.

"You've got some explaining to do." I swear I thought I saw pointed teeth as he grinned evilly.

Chapter 47

Attention

I couldn't help but pat Elijah on the shoulder as it looked like his soul was about to escape from his mouth. There were shadows underneath his lifeless eyes; his sunken cheeks making him look like a hollow skeleton.

"There there..." I sigh. Even Sylvie takes pity on him as she hops off of my head and lands on his, biting the crown of his head to stir him awake.

His ghastly eyes bore into me as he turns his head. "...not fair." He mumbles.

"What?" I lean in closer to him to hear what he was almost whispering.

He leans in closer to me, his lips almost touching my ears. "IT'S NOT FAIR GODDAMMIT!"

"AHH!" I jump in surprise as my ears start ringing. "What the hell! Don't shout into my ear!" I stir my pinky into my ear canal to wipe away the stray spit that was launched inside by my bitter friend.

"Looks, talent, and even luck with girls! Why do you have everything?" He places both of his hands on my arm and concentrates.

Confused by this seemingly random action, I ask, "What are you doing?"

"...Trying to see if I can absorb some of your Arthurness." He mumbles, still concentrating.

"Are you dumb?" I shake my head as I wave his hands off of me.

We were on our way to the dining hall a bit down from the dorms. I explained briefly to Elijah about how I met Tess (he really hated how I called her that) inside the Forest of Elshire. The whole time I was telling him the story, whether it was living inside the kingdom of Elenoir's Castle with Tess or learning mana manipulation from her Grandfather, I could almost see my words pierce through him as his life slowly drained from him.

“Do you know how attractive Dwarves are, Art?” He leans in a bit too close for comfort while the both of us kept walking.

“H-how much?” I peel my head back from my overly emotional companion.

“NOT-AT-ALL” He says matter-of-factly. “The sense of beauty that dwarves hold is the complete opposite of humans, Art! I may have been raised in their kingdom but there will never come a day when I can empathize with definition of ‘attractive’.”

I laugh at this because I can almost imagine what an attractive female would look like to the dwarves, but I ask anyway. “Haha! Elaborate for me how devastating your life was.”

“When I turned 8, my grandfather, the elder who took care of me, introduced me to whom he hoped would be my future wife. The whole week prior, he was going on and on about how beautiful and elegant she was. When she showed up, I swear I thought I was looking at a man, Art.” His body shivers from the thought of recalling his past nightmare.

“Her name was Helgarth and I swear she made me fear for my chastity. Her square jaw, her trunk-like, veiny limbs, her long, thick nose... She had a s-stubble on her upper lip, Art. She had FACIAL HAIR at the age of 9, Art!” Elijah was shaking me at this point, as I couldn’t stop laughing.

“Okay, okay I get it! You were a very deprived young boy who started going through puberty way~ too early for his age.” I shrug my palms up while trying to calm my fit of laughter.

“YOU spend your childhood filled with masculine woman who go around showing off their bulging arms around and see how you turn out to be when you see normal girls.” He shakes his head, returning back to his lifeless self.

“Well... You are in the most prestigious school as a Battle Mage Student, and you’re probably at least a full stage ahead of anyone our class, so just show off your skills. You’re bound to land someone, somehow.” I say, optimistically.

“Your pity is hurting me.” He exaggeratingly clutches his chest making the both of us laugh.

“I personally like your new uniform better.” Elijah mentions as he studies me. “It makes

you seem more strong and unapproachable somehow.” He nods in agreement at his own statement.

The new uniform I received from Director Cynthia wasn’t too different in terms of looks from my Scholar Mage uniform. It was composed of a white dress shirt with a single black stripe on the mid arm, above the elbows and a light gray vest. Both the new vest and dark gray pants were made from a different material though, with special engravings on the inside that made me suspect that it had protecting qualities to it. In place of my pocket watch on the breast pocket, however, was a strap that went across my chest and snugged in around my shoulder, holding my sheathed, silver knife over my heart. A gold string replaced the red string that I had tied around, underneath my collar, giving my whole attire a more royal look.

I looked down and let out a sigh. I had to admit that the uniform did look good, but I didn’t like gaudy clothes like this. There was also an outerwear piece that I was supposed to receive later when it was properly fitted for me.

“So what are you going to do about the Disciplinary Committee?” Elijah asks me a bit more seriously.

I tilt my head, not knowing what he was implying. “What do you mean?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he looks forward, realizing we’re almost at the dining hall. “I mean, I know you’re already part of this new committee and all but are you going to really take it seriously and stuff? It sounds like a lot of work.”

True. The Director wanted me to be a part of this new Committee but didn’t really specify what exactly I had to do. “I’ll try my best. I might as well give it my all since I’ve decided on going through with it right? Besides. Ellie is going to be attending this academy in a few years. I need to do my best to pave a path for her so when she does come, it’ll be easier on her.” I open the door, being welcomed by students’ indistinguishable conversations and the aroma of what the dining hall was serving tonight.

As the both of us stepped in, the hall turned quiet and I could feel the stares of the students as they studied us. Ignoring the glares and the occasional curious glances, we made our way into the line and got our food, situating ourselves in a back corner.

“Looks like you’re already popular, Art.” Elijah smirks as he picks up a piece of roasted

meat with his fork.

“What can I say?” I give an arrogant hair flip and the both of us start laughing.

“Ah! Don’t forget that we have the club rush tomorrow morning!” Elijah says, his mouth full of meat.

I let out a sigh at this. “Oh yeah... I have to go to the auditorium pretty early tomorrow. The Disciplinary Committee is being officially announced before the club rush starts tomorrow.” I play around a bit with my vegetables before trying to give it to Sylvie, who promptly rejects it.

Director Cynthia left me with a note with a couple instructions along with the new uniform she handed me.

“That means you’re going to meet the rest of the Disciplinary Committee! How exciting. Wake me up before you leave then.”

“Will do.” I pick up a piece of roasted meat for myself but Sylvie steals it before it reaches my mouth.

We conversed about what club Elijah should join and what classes we had. The Disciplinary Committee met every morning, which irked me. Looks like I’ll finally break my poor sleeping habits.

Besides that, my daily class schedule consisted of: Fundamentals of Mana Theory Practical Mana Manipulation and Basics of Artificing.

After lunch was when my upper division classes would start. Those classes were Deviant Magic Theory I, Team-fighting Mechanics I, and Spell Formations I.

During the Fall semester, there were a lot more upper division classes for Battle Mage students while for Spring semester, the classes consisted of a wider variety for Scholar Mage students.

Most students only took 3-4 classes a semester but I was essentially loaded with double the classes, my last class ending at 7 in the evening, not leaving me any time for clubs. As for Elijah, we only had Fundamentals of Mana Theory together; his other classes being comprised of Basic Chain-casting, and Mana Utilization I.

Clubs geared towards upper-division students met before lunch, since their classes were all in the evening, and vice-versa for underclassmen. "Maybe I should join a hand-to-hand fighting club. I heard that more and more Conjurers are trying to become at least a bit adept at close range fighting just in case." He ponders while shoving another piece of meat into his mouth.

"Mmm yeah I've heard of that from my father. He's been telling me that there are some conjurers that wants to be recruited to learn close-ranging fighting, though I don't exactly know how that'd work." I was wondering why I don't feel full even when my plate was empty, but then I realized that I didn't eat almost any of the meat thanks to Sylvie, who was now 'kyu'ing in satisfaction on top of my head.

During our meal, the both of us could tell that people were conversing about us, looks being shot every now and then from random people. However, none of them actually came up to us until now.

A group of students, all with Battle Mage uniforms, walked up to our table. Completely acting as if I didn't exist. The leader of the group, a tall male with wavy brown hair that was parted in half stuck his hand out to Elijah.

"My name is Charles Ravenpor, the 2nd born from the famous Ravenpor family. I'm sure you've heard of it right? I couldn't help but notice you spending time with someone beneath you like a Scholar Student. I'm being especially courteous today in letting you be in our group." His chin sticks out, confident that Elijah would take his hand.

"You should be honored that you get to be part of the Ravenpor group." One of the groupie echoes in the back.

"The Ravenpoop family? Never heard of a family named after a bird's feces. Have you Art?" Elijah looks at me with a very clueless look, making me laugh through my nose.

"No, but I'd be very embarrassed to be in family like the Ravenpoop even if I did know of them." I try to hide my smile as I play along in this immature exchange.

Some of the students nearby who was listening in on our conversation started snickering.

"Y-you... How dare mock a prestigious family like the RavenPOR house?" Charles slams his fist on our table, emphasizing his house name, which makes them laugh even more.

“I am a 2nd class student that should be shown respect! I reached out to you, a newbie, because I didn’t want a Battle Mage Student lower himself by being with a Scholar Student but you instead spit in my face like this?” His hand was already twitching to reach for the wand strapped to his right leg.

Elijah looks him dead in the eye and refutes, “First of all, it’s Scholar MAGE student. Arthur is just as much of a mage as any Battle mage student. Second, why would I go with someone who blatantly looks down on my best friend and roommate? Third, it’s obvious you’re not here out of kindness towards me but here because of hostility towards Arthur so stop your childish show and go piss off.”

I had to admit that when my friend put on a serious expression, coupled with his naturally sharp features, he did look quite scary.

Issuing duels inside a facility not meant for battle was prohibited so using magic inside the dining hall would result in quite a big punishment, but that didn’t seem to stop Mr. Ravenpor here.

Wind was gathering around him as he struggled to keep his anger under control. “Jack!” He roars, wind settling down around him as he calls forth one of his minions.

A boy that had a face that looked around 13 but a body that looked too big for his age stepped up from the back.

“Show these brats how things work around here.” He growls, stepping back.

Jack looks a little hesitant but Charles barks that he’ll be properly compensated, making Jack reveal a wicked grin as he fits a clawed gauntlet over his fists.

“Sucks for you.” He simply smirks, cracking his neck before splitting the table in half.

The dining hall was in a commotion by now as the students all gathered around, some standing up on the tables to get a better view.

Elijah protected his face in surprise as the table split into pieces but I remained unfazed, my legs crossed as I took a sip from the water cup I was holding, while even Sylvie was still sleeping.

“Are you crazy! This is a dining facility!” Elijah shouts as he stood up to face Jack, who cracked his clawed fists.

“Don’t matter. Boss is going to take care of everything anyway. Keep your teeth clenched now.” He smirks as his right fist glows in non-attribute mana.

He was a second-class student as well as well by the two stripes on his black tie, but even without an attribute, his core was still dark orange, which, for his age, was pretty damn good.

Elijah’s right hand glowed, his two rings glowing a dim yellow as he prepared a spell but I already noticed that Jack’s pitiful killing intent was directed towards me, not my friend.

I didn’t even look up and prepared to settle this quickly but once again, before I got the chance to do anything, vines shot out from the ground and wrapped tightly around Jack.

Chapter 48

Reminisce

It only took a couple of moments for the vines to completely encase Jack. As he struggled to break free, the vines twisted around tighter, making his face turn an ugly shade.

While most were confused, Charles seemed to know exactly what was going on as his face paled and he immediately stepped away from the commotion he created. Elijah was a bit surprised as well, his head turning left and right to see who used the spell, but the person responsible had yet to show herself.

Standing up, I face the suffocating Jack, who gave up on struggling against the vines. The atmosphere in the dining hall turned tense as no one spoke, everyone waiting for the perpetrator of the spell to show up. Giving Elijah a meaningful glance, I silently lift my arm, placing my palm on the vines as I release the spell.

Torrent.

Holding back on the amount of mana used on the spell, I will a gale of sharp winds from my palm.

“FWOOOOSHINGG!”

The Ravenpor groupies behind Jack all covered themselves against the sharp gale as they got caught in the spell as well. With the spell, I so graciously freed Jack from the vines that were choking him, but in the process shredded his clothes as well, leaving him the same way he came out from his unfortunate mother’s womb.

“COUGH COUGH!” Jack plops to his knees, his junior that looked a bit too petite compared to his large body dangling for everyone to see. Without either a word or a change in expression, I turn and walk towards Charles, who was still trying to discreetly make his way out of the dining hall. He was by the wall, and was almost in front of the main doors when I unsheathed the Disciplinary Committee knife I received from the Director, and threw it, imbuing wind mana into it.

“AAHH! What the hell?” As the knife cut through the air and pierced through his blazer, pinning him against the wall, I came face to face with him.

“Maybe it’s just me but I find it pathetic when brats like you who come from a noble family beat your chest for something that you never even earned. Before bragging about how powerful your family is, be competent enough to at least not embarrass them.” I pull out the knife he was struggling to remove in one swift swipe and leave through the door, not looking back.

The brisk autumn air greeted me as I closed the door, my breath becoming visible in a cloud in front of me.

‘It’s mama!’ Sylvie’s head shoots up from on top of my head.

I ignore my bond, looking up at the night sky illuminated by countless star as I speak out loud. “You know, you could’ve killed him if I didn’t disrupt the spell.”

“I was going to cancel it once he passed out. Besides, I know you were going to handle it.” From besides me a few meters away, the familiar voice responded.

“Pfft~ NOW you leave it up to me? What stopped you from doing the same this morning after the ceremony?” I snickered.

“...”

I walk towards the figure that was leaning against the wall of the building, her face and other recognizable features masked by the shadow of the starry night.

By her silence, I could already picture what sort of troubled expression she had on her face. I stood in front of the figure, I was close enough to see her face but she was looking down so I could only see the crown of her silvery gunmetal hair that seemed to shimmer.

“Ahem~” I awkwardly cough, covering my mouth with a fist as the silence between us felt like an eternity. Finally, she glanced up, revealing her face as she was fiddling with her hands behind her back.

“...”

““I’M SORR...””

THUD

““Oww!””

We instantly destroyed the awkward atmosphere as we head-butted each other by bowing in apology at the same time.

“PFFT~ Hahahaha! I guess we both wanted to apologize huh?” I couldn’t help but smile as I rubbed my slightly throbbing head.

“I guess so...” Tess was massaging her head too as she continued to look down.

Sniff

I squat down so I could see my childhood friend’s face. “Tess. Are you crying?” I tease, gently wiping her tears with the inside of my sleeve.

Sniff “It’s because it hurts...” Her eyes continue to avoid mine as she lets me wipe her face.

“Did it hurt that much?” My voice turns tender as I stand back up, gently patting the place where my head hit her.

“YES! It hurt a lot!” Smacking my hand away, she buried her face in my chest, wrapping her arms around my waist as she began crying.

The seconds seemed to elongate as I felt her body tremble from her erratic breaths and hiccups. I couldn’t help but smile as I hugged her back, patting her head comfortingly.

Sniff “I thought you hated me.” *Sniff* I could barely make out what she was saying in between her sniffles and the fact that her voice was muffled from speaking while her face was still buried in my chest.

“Even if there are times I get mad at you, I would never hate you, Tess.” I spoke gently.

“I don’t want that.” *Sniff*

“Don’t want what?”

“I don’t want you to get mad at me either!” She mumbled while her face still glued to my chest.

“Well this time, I was in the wrong. I shouldn’t have lashed out at you like that.” I realized that I don’t really treat Tess like everyone else. While most people don’t come off to me as worthwhile to get mad over, besides my family and Elijah, Tess would probably be the only one capable of making me be genuine, even if that was sometimes being immature.

“NO! I was wrong too! I-I shouldn’t have called you out like that in front of all of those people! B-but it was because I have to be the strict Student Council President in front of everyone, you know?” Her face looked desperate as she finally looked up, her concerned eyes red and a little puffy from crying.

“ARTTT!!!! You should’ve seen the faces of everyone after you... OH!” Elijah, who only saw the shaded outline of my back, came running towards me until he spotted who was with me.

Realizing that Tess was still wrapped tightly around me, I couldn’t help but give him an embarrassed look.

“I-I’ll see you b-back at our dorm...” He stammered out before darting off, almost tripping over his own feet from how fast he was running.

“Haha. Tess, I think it’s about time to let go of me.” I smiled as her face turned bright red from realizing how long she’s been clinging to me.

“O-oh right...” She immediately let go of me, taking a step back as her eyes looked down, too embarrassed to look at me.

I couldn’t help but let out a soft laugh at how my childhood friend really hasn’t changed. “Do you want to take a little walk with me?” I give her a smile as Sylvie jumps off from on top of my head unto her arms.

“Kyu!” ‘Long time no see mama!’

TESSIA ERALITH'S POV:

Each of his steps were light and confident as if he was always certain his direction and purpose. Was it the way he walked?

Those eyes that looked calm and poised, yet still a little playful... Was it his gaze?

The way it glowed even when it was this dark outside? Was it his smile?

What made me this stupidly attracted to him? He's just another boy! Another, rather talented, rather well-mannered and slightly better looking boy. That was it!

What was it about him that makes me become so foolish around him and why do I keep doing things to embarrass myself only in front of him?

"Haa..."

"Is something wrong?" He looks at me in concern as his gentle voice makes shivers go down my spine.

"N-no! Nothing's wrong haha!" I feel my face get red again so I pet Sylvie faster as a distraction. GOSH DANGIT!

I could feel his eyes studying me as we walked along the marble path, the only source of light from the moon that peeked in between the trees that arched the walkway. The last time we met earlier today, we barely spent a couple seconds before things got bad so it's been almost 4 years since we've last seen each other. I would stare at him too but I know I was going to turn bright red so I just keep my gaze down.

I wonder if he looks at any other girl like this. I want his attention all to myself just like now. I stop myself before I almost sigh out loud again.

We started talking about what we've both been doing these past couple of years. His time as an adventurer was really exciting but I couldn't help but be a little disappointed that he was with that girl named Jasmine the whole time.

"Pfft!" The corner of Art's eyes crinkled as he revealed his bright smile.

"W-what!" I couldn't help but hold Sylvie up defensively.

“It’s just that I’m enjoying the different expressions you’re showing me while I tell you my story.” I catch a glimpse of his eyes making me turn red again. This is getting ridiculous.

I would’ve been pretty cold if I didn’t have Sylvie as a heating pack, but Art doesn’t look cold at all. I wonder if being a beast tamer makes his body stronger in these situations too. I start getting embarrassed as I remember hugging him for so long.

He was really warm though.

I got a little less tense as we kept talking. I told him a bit about my training with Grandpa but I focused more on when Grandma Cynthia was my teacher.

“You call her Grandma?” His head tilts a little in curiosity.

Nodding, I reply, “She told me to call her that since I was her only disciple and since she doesn’t have any children.”

“I see...” He ponders

I continue on about the strict training I had to go through and how it was hard for my plant attribute magic to improve because of the lack of reliable teachers. Although there weren’t any other races that could manipulate plant attribute mana, even amongst elves, there were very few people that were adequate in plant magic. While some noble lineages do have the capacity to learn it, they end up focusing on another element instead because of how hard it was for them to learn plant magic.

“So you ended up becoming a dual specialist in plant and wind huh? Wow, I knew you’d be a talented mage.” His genuine look makes me feel proud. I get embellished praises from all sorts of different important figures but just a simple compliment from him makes me this happy.

He continues, “It makes sense that Director Goodsky should be teaching you then.”

I wanted time to stop as we reached the front of where the dorms were. Why was the dorms built so close to the dining hall? It should’ve been on the other side of the school...

“We should both get some sleep. It’s getting late and tomorrow is a big day.” He pats my head. I would enjoy it a lot more if it didn’t make me feel like he was treating me

like a kid.

“Y-yeah, you’re right. Congratulations on becoming a Disciplinary Committee member Art.” I try my best to smile but I start overthinking about how I look.

Fortunately, he just grins back as Sylvie hops back on top of his head. “Thanks.” I stare at his back as he starts heading to his dorm when he turns back around, surprising me.

“I almost forgot!” He takes my hand and brings it up, placing something from his pocket into my palm.

“Here! This will probably help you a lot.” Letting go of my hand, he gives me a playful wink before turning back around as Sylvie waves her small paw at me.

He didn’t even give me the chance to thank him.

Looking down, I study the small, dull green orb. It didn’t seem pretty special but it did mean a lot to me just because it came from Art. Knowing him though, this isn’t just some sort of decoration he wanted me to have.

“I wonder...” I will a bit of mana into the orb and I almost drop it from surprise, my hands trembling uncontrollably.

“T-this is...!”

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

‘Papa you’re really happy. Is it because you made up with Mama?’ Sylvie teases me as I walk up the stairs back to my dorm room.

‘Can it Sylv. And can you stop calling her Mama?’ I pinch my dragon bond’s ear, making her squirm.

“Room 394! Finally...” We walked pretty slowly and stopped in between while we talked so it was pretty late into the night. I opened the door carefully just in case Elijah was asleep but I almost jump in surprise to see him sitting cross-legged facing the door, his eyes bloodshot from staying up so late compared to when he usually sleeps.

“Err... I see you’re still awake.” I wave awkwardly.

“Hell yes I’m awake.” He crosses his arms and uses his chin to point at my bed, signaling me to sit.

“Haa... Go on.” I sigh helplessly as I let my best friend release his barrage of questions.



It was almost 4 A.M. when he was finished, the two of us sprawled out on our beds, tired both physically and mentally while Sylvie fell asleep a while ago.

“I can’t believe you were h-hugging her.” I see him shake his head while he was lying down on his back.

“I told you I’ve known her since she was 5. It’s not surprising that she’d be more comfortable around me.” I simply state.

He shakes head again. “After you left, some of the students knew that it was the President that used the vine spell since she’s the only one that could use it to that degree. Do you know all of the things the students called her?” He gets up and looks at me.

“What do they call her?” I ask, a bit interested.

“There were two I heard the most.” He leans in closer. “One. The Untouchable Princess.” He states.

“Untouchable? Why? Is she that much stronger than everyone else?” I ask.

Ignoring me, he says the other. “Lunar Goddess.”

“Huh? Why Lunar Goddess?” I chortle at the juvenile nicknames.

“Because she’s like the moon Art. The Moon looks so close that you can grab but no matter how much you try, you’ll never touch the Moon. But you! You t-touched the MOON! You HUGGED the Moon!” He flails his arm in defeat and plops back into bed.

“Go to sleep.” I retort. Both of us too tired to even try and wash up. My head is already hurting at the thought of how tired I would be in the morning.

Thoughts about what happened tonight kept me up. I kept imagining if I did the right thing at the dining hall. It was a habit I acquired from being a king to overthink my past actions and always plan my future actions. To my side, I could hear Elijah fast asleep, mumbling something about the Moon again.



“Wake up!” I smack Elijah on the stomach as I finish fastening on the shoulder strap for the knife that represented that I was a part of the Disciplinary Committee.

“OOF!” Elijah bolts up in surprise but groans once he realizes how tired and in pain he was. “I can see why you don’t like being woken up like this.” He mumbles as he rubs his stomach.

Smirking at my friend, I walk to the door. “I’m leaving now so hurry up and get ready. I’ll see you in first period.” Without looking back, I give him a wave and head towards the auditorium. I was supposed to formally meet all the other members of the Disciplinary Committee in the small waiting room inside the auditorium so I was a bit excited as to what kind of people they might be.

Sylvie “Kyu-ed” in excitement as well as she was swaying her head from side to side. After today, everyone will know that I’m part of the Disciplinary Committee. I grinned at myself after imagining what the Ravenpor group’s face would look like after becoming aware today what my different uniform meant to them.

Arriving at the back entrance to the auditorium, I straightened up my shirt, vest and strap and opened the door, feeling tired, sleepy and very curious.

Chapter 49

Disciplinary Committee

As I opened the door to the back entrance of the auditorium, I was met with an unexpected greeting.

“GROOOAAARR!!” My hair was blown back along with Sylvie, who was grabbing onto me to avoid falling off. Along with the deafening roar of the mana beast that greeted me came bullets of saliva that showered my face and upper chest.

“There there.” While wiping off the spit of the mana beast, I nonchalantly proceeded to pet its face that was inches away from my own. This mana beast that stood about 2 meters high while it was still on all fours had thick dark brown fur and a deep red mane around its head. Two vicious teeth spouted out from its top jaw, making it all the more menacing, but comparing to Sylvie’s dragon form, I could only see it as an overgrown kitten.

Even Sylvie looked at the Mana Beast with little interest as she just settled back on top of my head.

“Woah... he didn’t get surprised at all...” From behind the mana beast peeked out a student that looked to be a couple of years older than me. He had a very dull, light gray hair, almost white, that came down in bangs. He had narrow eyes that were virtually slits and had a smile on his face that didn’t come off as pleasant but more so mocking. Body wise, he was rather thin and tall, his overall frame looking quite frail. His uniform was very different from mine. He wore a dark gray oriental style loose robe that covered his arms and came down past his torso. His loose pants were black and he had a sash tied around his waist that was gold. Peeking out of the inside of his robe was the insignia that all of the Disciplinary Committee had to carry around, the silver knife. Something about him made me wary. He seemed mysterious and a tad off somehow.

“You must be the last DC officer to arrive! My name is Kai Crestless a fourth year! Just call me Kai!” His expression didn’t change at all, his eyes still narrowed and lips still smiling, but he put up his arm in a welcoming gesture, revealing his hands that were completely wrapped in bandages so that it looked like he had gloves on.

“Hello. My name is Arthur Leywin. Pleased to make your acquaintance.” I shook his bandage-wrapped hands.

“Bah! Another frail looking pretty boy! Why aren’t there any more REAL men in this Committee?” Looking around, I spot where the voice came from and I couldn’t help but remember what Elijah told me yesterday before dinner.

A female dwarf that stood around 145cm tall with limbs as thick as tree trunks hopped down from where she was sitting and came up to me. The indication that I could tell she was a female was by her long brown hair and high-pitched voice, neither of which didn’t suit her masculine appearance.

“Looks like we’ll be working together so I might as well introduce myself. I’m Doradrea Oreguard, a first year like yerself. Let’s get along ey?” She said simply while firmly smacking my waist, sending a jolt throughout my body. What power.

“Arthur Leywin. Nice to meet you.” I replied, rubbing my back.

“Well, come on now. Follow me. Kai and I waited in the front to see who the last guy was going to be. The rest of the DC officers are in the other room. Director Goodsky didn’t really mention who the final member was going to be so everyone is curious.” She led me through a hall, Kai following behind us with the mana beast.

“EVERYONE! THE LAST GUY IS HERE!” Doradrea shouts at the top of her lungs as we reach a room at the end of the hall.

Inside the gigantic room that I figured was used to hold events, I see 5 other figures.

Without further ado, I walk up closer and greet them all at once. “My name is Arthur Leywin and I just started attending this Academy as a Scholar Mage Student. I am a Dual Elemental attribute Augmenter capable in Wind and Earth. I give a curt bow.

“Arthur Leywin?” The first voice that speaks up sounded surprised. Looking back up, I see a boy that appeared to be around 17. He had deep, mahogany colored hair that was spiked out, making him look almost like a lion himself. He had fierce sword-shaped brows and his brown eyes produced a striking gaze. It took me a couple of seconds but I soon realized who he was.

“If I remember correctly, you must be Prince Glayder?” The longer I look at him, the more confident I became that he was Curtis Glayder, son of the king of Sapin.”

“I can hardly call myself a Prince now ever since the 3 kings and queens dismissed their title and called themselves The Council. Just call me Curtis.” He spoke very charismatically, his deep voice carrying a certain depth. His expression was a bit troubled though since his father’s guard did cause some problems for me the last time we met.

“Nice to see you again Curtis. You must be a 5th year now, right?” I just respond cheerily which eases the troubled look he had.

“Yup! 5th year fire attribute Augmenter as well as a Beast Tamer. Nice to see you again.” He announced while we grasped hands. While Kai’s uniform was styled in a robe, Curtis’ uniform looked much more intricate. His outfit reminded me of an old-fashioned military uniform without the cap. His black military blazer had dark gray accents and gold buttons. His right shoulder had a military cord that was attached to the collar of his blazer, giving him a refined, yet fierce aura.

“Ahh that World Lion that greeted me must be the one your father acquired at the Auction several years back.” Everything clicked as the mana beast that so kindly greeted me sat down behind Curtis.

“Ah... did Kai use Grawder to scare you?” He shoots a look at Kai who just shrugged back. “Anyways, yes. I remember you were with us when we purchased him as a cub. We formed an equals contract last year after he reached A class.” He tried to sound humble but I could tell he was extremely proud to call himself a Beast Tamer. I didn’t mind because it really was a great feat that he accomplished, especially the fact the he was able to form an equals contract instead of a master-servant contract with his beast. “Looks like your bond changed a bit as well! Although it didn’t really change much in size.” He rubs his chin while studying Sylvie who was asleep on my head. Just by analyzing his internal mana circulation, Curtis didn’t seem to have gone through assimilation since the World Lion’s beast will wasn’t too strong for him.

“Yeah, her growth rate seems awfully slow.” I say indifferently.

“It’s okay! Even though there are quite a bit of students here that have bonds, most of them aren’t beast tamers and not many of them even have equals contracts.” He pats my shoulder, trying to comfort me.

Looking closely, Curtis and his World Lion looked oddly similar. Curtis’ hair and Gawrtor’s mane was of comparable color and both of them having a fierce look.

“Ah right! You remember my sister Kathyln, right?” He continues. The petite, black-haired girl that I remember being pretty gave me a silent bow. She was dressed very similarly to his brother except instead of pants; she wore a skirt that came down above her knees much like all the other girls in this academy. The only girl I’ve seen so far that hasn’t worn a skirt was Doradrea, which I didn’t complain about... at all.

“Nice to see you again.” I give a simple bow in response. She has grown to look more and more like her mother. The stark contrast of her flawless porcelain skin and her jet-black hair and dark eyes with long lashes made her look like a doll.

“Nice to meet you once more, Arthur. I am a first year as well coming in as a Scholar Mage student. I am a single specialist Conjurer in Ice Attribute magic.” She bows once more; her expression was set like stone.

I see... She’s a deviant!

“I guess I’m next, although the order is off! My name is Claire! Claire Bladeheart. I’m a 6th year Battle Mage student with dual attribute in fire and wind and I’m also the leader of the Disciplinary Committee! I’m an Augmenter like yourself so just ask me if you have any questions!” This upperclassman oozed out positivity and passion from her very pores. She wasn’t nearly as pretty as Tess or Kathyln but she did have her own charm, with her scarlet red hair that came down to her chin. Claire wore a military-styled uniform as well but instead a golden cord like the Glayder siblings, both her shoulders had gold epaulettes, which were basically ornamental shoulder pads along with an embellished collar that went up around her neck. That, along with her light gray and gold accented skirt with knee boots gave her uniform a much more royal feel compared to my simple one.

I tried imagining myself in a uniform like Claire’s and I shuddered at the thought. While it looked great on her, I preferred a much less flashy uniform.

It took me a second to register but I suddenly remembered why her name sounded so familiar. “Are you perhaps related to Kaspian Bladeheart?” I quiz.

“Oh? Do you know my uncle?” She tilted her head to one side.

“No. I’ve just heard many great things about how strong Kaspian Bladeheart is from my father’s ex party member.” I gave her a warm smile as she nodded in understanding.

“I see. Well, I’ve received training from my Uncle as soon as I awakened so much of my techniques are similar to his. Of course I still have a long way to go, though.” I see her place her hand on the golden hilt of her rapier that she had strapped on her left side.

“Well if it isn’t Arthur Leywin. Long time no see!” A tall blonde elf that looks to be a couple of years older than me walks up, crossing his arms while he looks down at me.

“I apologize... Do I know you?” I really had no idea who this elf was until Sylvie mentally transmitted who he was.

“Ah! You’re Feyfey!” I point at him in surprise. Boy did he get big! He was at least a head taller than me and he did turn out to become quite the pretty boy.

Feyfey’s face instantly turned beet red as he placed both hands on my shoulders. “It’s FeyRITH... Feyrith Ivsaar III. And although I’m a first year like you, I’m still a couple of years older than you so don’t call me by nicknames. I’m a Water specialist Conjurer by the way.” I could see veins popping from his forehead.

“Haha! Long time no see!” I exclaim as I shake his hands while he just looks at me, bewildered. His uniform was completely black with gold stripes across his shoulders. It was simpler than everyone else’s but it fit him well.

“Last but not least, this is Theodore Maxwell!” Claire gets in between Feyrith and I and directs my attention to the last member.

“Hmph! Seems like the Disciplinary Committee is low enough to recruit twerps now.” Theodore stands up and I swear I thought he was a bear. He stood at about 2 meters high at least, easily around the same height as Gawrtor, Curtis’ World Lion. His uniform was just a vest that was unbuttoned, revealing his bulging muscles. By the tear marks on the arm openings of the vest, I can assume that it wasn’t originally a vest.

He stood in front of me and placed a hand on my shoulder.

“VMMMMMM”

Suddenly, I felt the weight on top of me increase several times over as my feet began sinking, the floor around me beginning to crack. This was a deviant capable of manipulating gravity.

My body was able to withstand it thanks to the assimilation I went through with

Sylvia's Dragon Will but I still definitely felt my body begin to protest. I strengthen my body further with mana as I look at Theodore dead in the eye.

He wanted to test ME?

"Hmph." Feeling the cold, wordless gaze I give to him, Theodore releases his skill and walks away, muttering "not bad."

Whistles

"Arthur has guts. Feyrith crumbled to his knees when Theodore did that to him." Kai snickers from the side.

"I'm a Conjurer while Arthur is an Augmenter! Please do not compare me to brutes like you guys." He lashes out, his face red from embarrassment.

"Now now! I'm excited as to what this semester will bring us! We're going to be a team from now on guys! We'll get chances to bond and get closer so look forward to it!" Claire pipes up in a cheery voice as she puts her hand out.

"I'm looking forward to it!" Kai puts his bandaged hands on top of Claire, his face still a mocking smile.

"Aye! Sounds like we're going to have some interesting times!" Doradrea gets on her toes as she puts her beefy hand on top of Kai's.

"Haha! Yes! Let's do our best!" Curtis places his hand in as well, Kathryn wordlessly following suit.

I just met everyone and I'm already tired. "Sigh... I'm sure it'll be a blast." I let out while placing my hand on top of Kathryn's, Sylvie running down my arm and placing her paw as well.

Theodore puts his massive hand on top of Sylvie and my hand, making the whole circle stumble a step forward. As Theodore gives a silent nod, Claire gives us a big, confident smile and shouts, "TO US! THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE!"

"""""""" AYE!""""""""

“Before the club rush commences, the Student Council would like to formally introduce to you students of this academy, a group that was personally picked by the Director in hopes to resolve and prevent disputes amongst students as well as enforce penalizing measures for troublemakers. While the Student Council’s main job is to help the Director make sure this academy and the events that are held run smoothly, this group’s job allows them to use magic appropriately to uphold the peace and safety of students, whether it may be from other students or from trespassers. Please join me in welcoming the Disciplinary Committee!” Tessia’s voice rings at her last words.

The auditorium fills with applause as the red curtains that we stood behind are raised. We stood there, shoulders square and our hands glued to our sides. I had to admit that with people like Curtis with Grawder behind him, Theodore, Claire and even Feyrith, we looked pretty damn impressive in our color-coordinated uniforms.

I took a peek at Tessia and I realized she was staring at me but as soon as our eyes met, she quickly turned her head away. As we stood in front of the students of Xyrus on the stage side by side, we pulled out our knives and held it out in front of us so the insignia showed. Unsheathing our knife, we proceeded to do a small, choreographed routine before we saluted.

Claire spoke out on behalf of the Disciplinary Committee with a small speech before we all headed out towards the back of the stage, leaving the crowd with mixed emotions.

For some students, the Disciplinary Committee meant to serve as a shackle that prohibited their spoiled behavior. For others, the Disciplinary Committee served as an aegis for them, protecting the students from needless harm.

Chapter 50

Classes and Professors (1)

“Hey isn’t that one of the DC officers? I think his name was Arthur, right?”

“Isn’t he only a first year? How was he able to get into the Disciplinary Committee? Does he have connections or something?”

“Stupid. Even if he had connections, I hear everyone from the Disciplinary Committee needs to be really strong.”

“He’s kinda cute, no?” “Yeah, he’s totally my type.”

“That white fox on top of his head is so adorable!”

I sat towards the back in the class with Elijah next to me. The constant murmurs and whispers that echoed in the classroom made my head hurt. The professor for our first class, Fundamentals of Magic Theory, had yet to arrive, allowing the discussions of this morning’s ceremony to ceaselessly go on.

“Look at how popular you are Mr. DC Officer.” Elijah nudges me with his elbow while giving me a sarcastic smirk.

Before I had the chance to respond, the person who I assume is the professor, walks in with confident strides.

Using the folder he was holding onto as a gavel, he thumps it on the front podium before starts speaking. “Now now... I realize that there are many wonderful things to talk about, but you guys aren’t very good at gossiping. If the person of topic is in the same room and can hear what you guys are saying, then it really isn’t gossip now, is it?” He looks in my direction and gives me a wink, making me shake my head in defeat.

Our professor seemed pretty young, at most in his mid-thirties. He had well parted brown hair that he kept neat and styled. His face was freshly shaven to reveal his narrow jaw. He was on the thinner side, but in no ways out of shape. He had very good proportions, considering he was a Conjurer, which I could tell by the wand strapped

to his side.

Some of the students gossiping shrank down in embarrassment but most of the students just laughed.

“My name is Professor Avius and I must say that it’s great to meet you all. While this is technically a basic class and some may think that it is unnecessary, I, on the other hand, believe this class is the foundations for what will make you a great mage. We won’t be doing much casting in this class but there will be fun assignments and projects that I will assign along the way, so look forward to it!”

With that last note, the class erupted in a synchronized groan at the thought of doing projects. I couldn’t imagine what sort of projects he was going to assign 12-14 year olds but it should be rather easy.

“On that note, I think today is a rather fine day to have a lecture for! You are not going to get any younger so absorb as much knowledge as you can while your brains are still fresh! Take out your notebooks and writing utensils!” His thin face wrinkles as he smiles.

Elijah adjusts his glasses and promptly takes out a fresh new notebook and pen while eagerly writing the title of the class and today’s date.

I just lean forward and rest my chin on my hand as I begin to listen.

“Today’s topic will focus on the segregation between Conjurers and Augmenters!” He writes messily on the chalkboard.

“There is a deeply embedded discrimination against Augmenters by Conjurers on the premise that Augmenters are ‘brutes’ or ‘savages’ that can only fight by getting themselves dirty.” He uses his fingers to air quote.

“This is a rather uneducated stigma that everyone should get rid of right here and right now.” He leans forward, his face turning serious.

This causes a few murmurs of disagreement and some of acknowledgement.

“Coming from the point of view of a Conjurer, it is silly to say that we are above Augmenters because our bodies are more suitable for influencing mana remotely because this is an advantage we have only while we are in lower levels.” He scribbles some key points on the chalkboard.

“When a mage’s mana core, Conjurers and Augmenters alike, reach the silver stage, the ability to manipulate mana becomes much more unrestricted. There becomes less of a distinction between the usage of mana veins and mana channels because the purity of mana that is produced from our mana core enables us to freely manipulate mana remotely and directly.” He underlines remotely and directly while circling the point “less of a distinction”

I hear Elijah ‘ooh’ in understanding and furiously scribble the statement into his notebook.

Hmm... This professor at least knew what he was talking about. While training, I’ve become more and more aware that the higher the stage you reached into your mana core cultivation, the less of a true distinction there would.

“So tell me class, if, in the end, two mages, one Conjurer and one Augmenter, both reach the silver core stage, who would have the advantage? I for one say that it’s is either evenly matched or that even the Augmenter would have an advantage.” This statement creates even a louder protest from the students.

“Before you shoot me down, think about this. Until the Silver stage, assuming that we have both the talent and necessary luck to get there, both Conjurers and Augmenters train in developing their magic. However, Augmenters, since the time they awaken, which is usually during the prepubescent age, also train in hand-to-hand combat, refining their bodies along with their skills. As the Augmenter becomes stronger and reaches the latter stages of his core, he will continue to develop his long-range skills, although it may be inferior to Conjurers at this point. However, once the Augmenter reaches closer and closer to the pinnacle of his core development, casting long-range spells will become more and more natural while the Augmenter will still naturally keep his combat skills. So tell me... are Conjurers REALLY the more noble, more dominant types of mage?”

“Some old fashioned mages continue to believe that conjurers remain the prevailing mana manipulator but Director Cynthia, along with many other influential figures in this Continent are trying to establish ways to inhibit this belief. I implore you youngsters to keep this fact in mind. Augmenters, don’t get hot headed because of this topic since, at this stage, you are still clearly at a disadvantage against Conjurers. Conjurers, don’t just mope at this news and develop your combat skills. While it may be harder for you to defend yourselves without the natural competency in forging mana around your body internally, that doesn’t mean there is no way to use spells to

strengthen your body. So learn how to fight hand-to-hand.” He closes his notes and stops talking, leaving a moment of silence for us to digest what we just heard.

“Any questions?” He says softly, giving us a sincere smile.

Elijah’s hand immediately shoots up and the Professor points at him to ask away.

“Professor, if what you’re saying is true, what is really the end result between the two category of mages when they reach the Silver stage or even higher?” He asks seriously, not a hint of the girl-thirsty friend in sight.

“Good question... Elijah Knight.” He looks down at his notes before he responds. “The end result is two mages with different preferences in styles of fighting. The Conjurer at this stage will be able to imbue their body with mana just like an Augmenter can at lower stages, but his or her fighting style will lean more towards long-range combat, consisting of many layers of spells to trick and weave around an Augmenter who may be more adept if they get close.” He writes down some of the major points.

“As for the Augmenter, while long range spells will become more natural for him or her just like the Conjurers at this stage, they usually lean more towards fighting up closer and using projectile spells more straight-forwardly. Augmenters, after all, are not as accustomed to remotely fighting like the Conjurers who, in order to distance themselves from close-range threats, prepare many layers of spells through multi-casting and chain-casting.” He circles the key words for us to remember.

Elijah just nods in understanding as he again writes down, almost word for word, what the professor just explained.

The class ended with a few more minor questions from various classmates. As the giant bell tower rang, the professor wrapped up the discussion and we prepared for our next class.

“I’ll see you at lunch then?” Elijah asks while he was packing up his bag.

“Sure. The person who gets there first saves the other a spot in line.” I patted my friend on the back before leaving through the door.

As I walked through the densely packed hall, I sensed some gazes here and there after they recognized my appearance and uniform. On the way to my next class, which was Practical Mana Manipulation, I realized that there were quite a bit of students who had

bonds. Most weren't so impressive, like the horned rat I saw on a student's shoulder, but there were some rather large beasts that students were proudly showing off. This boy who looked to be around 15 was riding on top of a giant lizard and had his chin proudly out. I didn't even know what that lizard's name was but from the amount of mana it had inside its beast core, it couldn't be more than a C class mana beast.

When I arrived to my next class, I noticed that the layout of this room was very different. It was shaped like a miniature arena, with a battling platform in the middle, encased in a barrier field, and rows of seats circling around it.

I made my way to a random spot and sat down. 'I'm hungry,' Sylvie grumbles as she starts thumping her head on top of mine. 'Yeah, me too; lunch is still a bit away though, do you want to go and catch something?' Sylvie nods and scurries off at a speed that startled me. She was surprisingly fast when it comes to food.

More and more students started filling the room after a few minutes. While most were first years, there were some second years that decided to take this class later.

"May I sit here?" I turn my head to find Kathyln in her Disciplinary Committee uniform standing beside me.

"Sure, go ahead." I move my bag that I had on the seat next to me so she could sit. Her expression doesn't change but she does give me a slight bow before removing her notes, carefully straightening out her skirt in a lady-like manner before taking a seat.

"Well look who we have here! If it isn't Princess Kathyln and my rival, Arthur Leywin." From the front of the door, Feyrith spots me as he confidently walks towards where Kathyln and I were sitting.

Since when did he become my rival... and a rival in what exactly?

"Aren't you loud this morning." I lean my head on my hands as I look at him.

"Well it is a fine morning today. Didn't the commencement ceremony today make you excited?" He harrumphs as he takes a seat next to on the other side.

Why is he sitting next to me? I thought he wasn't very fond of me.

"While it is a bit late into the morning, it is still technically the morning so... Good Morning!" A rather upbeat, bulky man that wore a light armor clapped to get

everyone's attention. He looked more like a low class Adventurer instead of a Professor but when I inspected his mana core level, I was surprised to see that he was light yellow stage.

"Well we have quite the crowd of students. I know my class is always popular but I'm honored to have this many students! My name is Professor Geist. Welcome ladies and gents, and welcome DC officers. It is a privilege to have you in my class." I couldn't tell whether he was being sarcastic or not when he directed his little welcome at us but I chose to not mind it.

"This is Practical Mana Manipulation, or PMM as I like to call it. That means that we will be doing things very practically! Practically, in my definition, means through example because what better way to learn than through hands on experience, right?" His deep bass voice booms throughout the class, waking up anyone that might still be sleepy, which included me.

"I understand that most of you are first years and that many of you have just awakened not too long ago. However, parents have been more and more dedicated in teaching their children as soon as they awaken before they even send them here, so even that assumption is mostly inaccurate. However, for the sake of equality, I shall assume that every first year is a beginner in mana manipulation, of course with the few exception, i.e. the three sitting right there." He points to us while giving us a wink, drawing attention to the three of us from everyone inside the room.

"I'm sure EVERYONE, including myself, is curious as to what sort of level in ability our newly formed DC has. They are the ones that are going to be protecting the students here in this academy after all, right?" Several shouts of agreement spawn from around the room.

I inwardly sighed, realizing that this professor was going to make this class a real pain in the ass for me. I saw even Kathlyn's brow twitch in annoyance on her usually expressionless face.

"Hmph! Well if Professor Geist insists, I shall volunteer myself on behalf of the Disciplinary Committee to demonstrate the ability that our group, who was personally picked by the Director, possesses." Feyrith gets up from his seat and places his right hand over his heart in a proud manner.

Sigh...

“HAHA! THAT’S more like it! It’s Feyrith, correct? Come down to the stage.” He gestures.

Feyrith elegantly hops down from his seat unto the battle arena that was in the center of the large classroom. Some of the females cheer for him while I hear some males boo at him.

“Hmm, if my guess is correct, you are a light orange stage Conjurer with water specialization correct? Pretty good for a 15 year old, even as an elf.” He rubs his chin, studying him.

“Yes! By the fact that I cannot sense your mana core level, I assume that you must be quite a bit higher level than myself. It is an honor to receive your tutelage.” While Feyrith’s response was very well mannered, he had a slight tone of arrogance, as if implying that even if the professor was higher level, he could stand his own against him.

“Of course! I am a light yellow level stage after all! To make things fair, I will only use long range attacks in this demonstration.” He took out a two-handed sword from a dimension item he had on somewhere and stabbed it into the stadium behind him.

I could tell Feyrith was about to protest that it wasn’t necessary but before he could, Professor Geist holds his hand up. “Please~ If I were to lose, I would at least have an excuse, right? Please give this old man some slack.” He winks at him as the other students start laughing.

He sounded sincere but I could tell that he was confident in winning against Feyrith, even with this handicap.

“Feyrith is going to lose.” Kathryn says softly.

“Oh really? How can you tell?” For me, it was just a gut feeling but it seemed like Kathryn saw something that I didn’t.

She doesn’t respond so I just go back to watching the mock battle that was about to start.

“Let me quickly set up the barrier before we begin so that our audience is safe from mana projectiles.” The professor mumbles a few incantations and a space around the arena starts glowing dimly.

“Let us begin!” He grins as Feyrith takes out his wand and prepares for a spell.

“Water Serpent!” A stream of water circles around Feyrith and soon takes the form of a giant snake. “Flood Domain!” Feyrith instantly sets off another spell after the water serpent spell is formed and soon, a pool of water forms on top of the arena and the water serpent dives into the layer of water that surrounds both Feyrith and Professor Geist.

A domain spell was a rather higher-level technique that was used to make the territory that the mage is fighting on more advantageous to them.

“Fireball” Professor Geist simply shoots out a fireball but it nonetheless takes me by surprise. The low-tier spell that every fire attribute mage learns forms in Professor Geist’s palm but it was blue.

It amazed me that an Augmenter was able to figure out and apply the theory behind the properties of fire when even the smartest Conjurers had trouble efficiently using it.

The fireball that was a bright blue shot out of Professor Geist’s hand and flew towards Feyrith, who had no idea how strong that spell actually was.

“You’ll have to do better than that, Professor!” Feyrith confidently lifts his wand and controls the layer of water on the ground to manifest into a thick wall of water.

As soon as the fireball hits the water wall, steam gushes out and through the other side, a much smaller, but still existent blue fireball makes its way towards my fellow DC member.

Feyrith’s expression changes as he realizes he’s going to get hit by the fireball but he’s able to react in time to form another layer of water in front of him to minimize the damage.

“Oof” The fireball that was reduced to the size of a fingernail by the time it reached Feyrith nonetheless leaves a hole in the protective uniform that he was wearing, knocking him back a couple of steps before he stumbled on his butt.

“Do you surrender?” Professor Geist gives a wide grin as he juggles two more blue fireballs in his hand.

“Y-yes... I concede.” Feyrith has his head down low in shame as he makes his way towards us, his uniform wet.

The students were all mumbling about how the DC weren’t that great, doubting whether we actually had the capability to protect them.

“You did well Feyrith.” I pat the elf’s back. He did well considering he didn’t know what he was up against. What was this professor trying to do by making a fool of us here? Did he just want to boost his ego by picking on his students?

“Would anyone else like to volunteer?” He states while looking at Kathyln and I. I was about to raise my hand but was startled when Kathyln suddenly shoots up from her seat and speaks. “Please guide me well.” She says simply before lightly hopping down to the arena.

Chapter 51

Classes and Professors (2)

“Kathryn Glayder. I must say that it is an honor to have your presence in my humble class.” Professor Geist gives a deep, exaggerated bow. “Please do not hold it against me for whatever the results may be from this ‘demonstration.’” He continues, putting on a pitiful face.

With her emotionless face she just nods, drawing her staff out from the dimension ring she had on her pinky.

“Very good! Let us proceed!” The Professor claps, fire igniting from between his palms.

Without a word, she lifts up her sky blue staff. Before Professor Geist had the chance to unleash his fireball, two javelins of ice form around Kathryn.

“Shoot.” I hear my fellow Disciplinary Committee officer mutter before the javelins fire towards our professor.

So she decided to go the offensive route to keep Professor Geist from attacking her.

A faint smirk creeps up on our professor’s face as he lifts up his hands that were still aflame, ready to block the ice spears.

“SSSSSSSSSSSSHHHAAAAA”

As soon as the ice javelins touch the fire on his palms, it instantly melts, disappearing slowly as the blue flames decrease in size as well.

“Ice Javelin.” She mutters again, this time, instead of two, 5 spinning javelins form near Kathryn.

“Shoot.” Her face looks cold, reminding me of an ice goddess that would freeze anyone who gets near her.

“Haha! Impressive! As expected of our princess!” Professor Geist grins, the class

leaning forward to get a better view of this intense battle. Since most of the students were first years, they weren't at the level where they'd be able to conjure something like this, let alone almost instantly.

Our professor concentrates as the 5 spears head toward him ready to pierce through if not countered.

"Ember Wisps!" The spell he was preparing was finished in time as Professor Geist jumps back, releasing small, floating orbs of blue flames.

Wasn't this the spell Lucas used during his rank examination?

"Break." Kathyln mutters and wills her 5 ice javelins to shatter into an uncountable amount of small, sharp shards of ice.

"Fire!" Professor Glayder, his face not nearly so smug as before, wills his orbs of blue fire to shoot at Kathyln.

Kathyln, on the other hand, was so focused on finishing her final spell that she ignored the incoming streams of blue fire about to hit her.

"Ice Tornado!" Her voice filled with a faint panic as she realizes upon finishing her spell that she was about to receive the brunt of our professor's spell.

PROFESSOR GEIST'S POV:

That idiot! Why didn't she defend herself instead of trying to finish the last spell?

As the tornado of ice shards begin to whirl around me, I become nervous. I wasn't scared from this fancy spell; I was scared that she might be gravely injured.

Wasn't it common sense for a Conjurer to have a layer of defense in battles? I chose a relatively easy spell to counter and the fact that she's a Deviant specializing in Ice made it all the more easier for her. Did she want to win that much that she chose to forgo that?

I cancel the spell but only the ember wisps disappear. The streams of blue fire that they shot at the stupid princess is still heading her way.

Fuck. I'm screwed.

Scorch Field. I will a layer of heat around me to melt the shards of ice rotating around me. I'm left with multiple light scratches but I don't care. What happened to the Princess? I didn't hear any screams from the other students. Maybe she was okay?

Damn... I should've stopped after making a fool of the elf.

After the layer of ice shards that were blocking my view all melt, I immediately try to find the Princess but instead, I find the last member of the three DC officers in my class, Arthur Leywin, in front of Kathyln, who was still covering her face with her arms in panic, with his palm out in front of him and his other arm around the princess.

His eyes... I couldn't help but involuntarily tremble from his killing glare that pierced through me. It felt even sharper than those ice spears that the princess threw at me.

"I think this little game of yours has gone on long enough, don't you think?" His expression stays icy, the innocent façade that I now know he usually kept on nowhere in sight as his domineering gaze looks at me without remorse. Was this his true face?

"While I am thankful for your concern over the Princess, it was unnecessary, as I had it all under control." No way was I going to lose face right here, on the first day, in front of all of my students.

"Under control?" Arthur's brow slightly twitches and I can sense his annoyance. Was it just me that was feeling this pressure? This isn't normal. AA class mana beasts didn't even have this much pressure.

"Yes. Do you think that I, a Professor at this esteemed Academy, would actually put one of my students in harm's way?" I say calmly. There was no proof! Today was all a little mistake.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

This ingrate really plans on insisting that he had this all under control. I already knew from watching Lucas that once the remote spell from the wisps are shot they can't be cancelled. Then again, there was no proof since I blocked it.

“I see... then in that case, allow me to take the place of my colleague in this ‘demonstration.’”

“Haha... well if you insist. I seem to have scared the Princess a little too much with my last spell. I should’ve cancelled it earlier if I knew you were going to interrupt. Now some of my students may misunderstand that I was trying to actually hurt her.”

Even now, this pathetic excuse of an instructor was trying to defend his position. I could already tell from the various murmurs around the class that most of the students already believed in what he was saying.

I turn back to Kathyln. “You’re okay, Kathyln. Do you think you can make it back to your seat on your own?” I gently stir her from her stupor.

“Y-yes... I’m really sorry.” For the first time, I saw a change in Kathyln’s expression as she looked really embarrassed, her porcelain white skin, flushing a light red as she turned away, going back to her seat.

“Then please guide me well.” I turn back to Professor Geist and draw Dawn’s Ballad. The translucent teal blade triggered gasps and mutters of amazement as even Geist looked at my sword, wide-eyed in wanting.

“Quite the nice weapon you got there. Since you are an Augmenter, I suppose it would be fair to let you choose which method you would like for me to fight in.” He shrugs his shoulders helplessly as he walks towards where his sword was embedded into the ground.

“It doesn’t matter.” I respond simply.

I could see a vein popping in annoyance from our Professor as he looks back at me.

“I Insist.” He retorts.

“Then please go with what you’re more confident in.” I take a couple steps forward, my face still peering deep into him, studying his every movements and actions.

Scum or not, this Professor was still a light yellow class veteran Augmenter. The fact that he had the insight to use blue fire means that he’s pretty capable.

I see the once grinning professor scowl, as his face turns a bit red. I could tell he really

wanted to leave an amazing impression on his class, and so far, I wasn't giving him much face.

"Very well then. I'll be sure to go easy on you." The upper portion of his face betraying the smile he was trying to put on.

Pulling out his sword with ease, he makes his way towards me as well, his sword dancing around him gracefully as he handles it with little effort.

"CLANK!" He blinks towards me without warning, swinging his blade down with a force that wasn't just 'going easy'.

His sword was imbued in a layer of blue fire, the heat that radiated from it making deadly. After parrying his initial surprise attack I use wind attribute mana to keep the trail of fire away from me.

Being only able to use wind and earth mana made me have to really think about how to best utilize my assets to overcome a stronger opponent. While it would've been easy to use blue fire myself, I didn't have that option right now.

His bombardment continues, the force of each swing and stab getting faster and stronger, as if trying to test the limit I could handle. Every time I parried it or dodged his attack with ease, his next attacks would be kicked up a notch.

I wasn't using any spells to receive his attacks, just mana strengthening and pure sword technique, which seemed to frustrate our Professor even more.

"I'm sure the Disciplinary Committee aren't only rats who keep dodging and running away." He says loudly, putting on a joking face.

"Is there really a need for me to attack when our esteemed professor can't even land an attack on a first year student?" I counter, putting on an innocent face.

He doesn't answer as his lips contort in anger. By this time, a couple of the students have already caught on that this wasn't just a simple demonstration, some whispering if they should call the Director or the Student Council over.

Professor Geist's attacks become fiercer as he starts implementing several spells along with his attacks.

“Flame Pillar.” A stream of blue fire shoots up from the ground beneath me as I instantly sidestep to avoid it, countering him with a concise strike to his neck.

Catching him by surprise, in order to dodge my blade he jumps back a lot more than he has to, a bead of sweat forming.

“Even rats become deadly when cornered, Professor.” I shoot him a snide grin as I immediately close the distance between the two of us.

Appearing right next to him, I will wind mana around the blade of my sword as I prepare for a spell. Each swing I take forms a still path of wind, confusing Professor Geist who was still able to block my blows. Every swipe, every lunge, and every swing I took created an almost transparent path of air in its trajectory.

Professor Geist wasn’t trying to put on an act of confidence anymore, concentration etched unto his face as he tries to block my flurry of attacks.

He was reaching the edge of the arena as each blow from me forced him to take a step back, the flames on his sword flickering helplessly upon receiving each attack.

It’s about time to end this.

I will the surface of the ground where he was about to take his next step to concave in, making him slightly lose his balance. As expected of a veteran Augmenter, he stumbles for a split second but was able to soon regain his balance. However, that split second was all that I needed.

Tempest.

The dozens of trails of wind that was produced from each of my mana-instilled blade suddenly glows and shoots out. My assault reached its climax as the speed of my attacks increased, my blade becoming barely visible. All the while, the spell, Tempest, I just activated followed behind each of my attack, making my barrage a chain of both my sword and the sharp blades of wind.

“AHHH!” Overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of attacks that he couldn’t hope to all block, he stumbles unto his butt and rolls out of the arena.

“BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM...” The protective barrier that blocked all spells from going through flickered and cracked as my tempest spell bombarded against it.

“CLANGG” A very sharp sound was produced as the barrier broke. It was strong enough to block all but one last blade of wind from my spell, which grazed my Professor’s neck, producing a trickle of blood.

Fortunately, the Professor’s mana imbued body was strong enough so that my deadly blades of wind only grazed him, but he was still flat on his ass, his face pale in fright and knees shaking as I bury my blade in the ground right next to his carotid artery.

Pulling out my sword and putting it back into my dimension ring, I look down at our Professor. “Thank you for your guidance.”

As if on cue, the bell rings and I walk out of the room, leaving the entire class’s eyes wide and jaws slack.

“...A-Arthur~” I hear a soft voice from behind me. It was Kathyln running towards me with Feyrith following behind.

“I had to admit that you were impressive back there Arthur. As expected of my rival.” He crosses his arms, but his face looks a little disheartened.

Putting an arm on the elf’s shoulder, I say to him. “You did good out there, Feyrith. If you knew the type of spell that the professor was using, I know you would’ve made more preventive measures.”

“O-of course! If I knew that the specific spell he used was a lot stronger than I anticipated, I’m sure I would’ve came out as the victor in the end.” He says, but the faint smile on his face showed that he appreciated what I just said.

I turn to Kathyln who was still a bit shaken up. “Are you an idiot?” I say to her, flicking her lightly on the forehead.

She looks at me in utter shock as even Feyrith looks a bit panicked.

“If you chose to defend yourself instead of focusing so much on beating the guy, you wouldn’t have put yourself out at risk like that. Don’t be so stubborn and think things through more carefully. You know... you’re awfully emotional for someone whose face never changes.” I give her a playful smirk and walk to my next class, leaving the princess in a daze while Feyrith was panicking how to console her.

“Kyu!” ‘Ah~ I’m full! How was class, Papa?’ Sylvie scurries on top of my head and

settles in, messing up my hair.

‘Meh, it was okay.’ I simply say, patting my precious bond.

Chapter 52

Classes and Professors (3)

While walking to my next class, I couldn't help but become a bit frustrated in myself. I was impatient back there, only wanting to overpower Professor Geist to end it fast. Using only my wind and earth attribute, I couldn't end it as easily as I wanted to. I guess being blessed with too many gifts have made me become a bit too impertinent. I know I've yet to reach the pinnacle of strength in this Continent but I definitely had enough advantages that would allow me to reach the top. With that mindset, I needed to stop comparing myself to students my age and think bigger. My only hope was that the upper division classes would offer insight in mana manipulation that I couldn't receive on my own.

I was rather interested in my next class, Basics of Artificing. Artificing was something that never existed in my old world. I'm sure there were relevant ties to technology that was used in my old world but the premise of manipulating and coding mana to have specific uses designated into an object would be new to me.

Upon entering the classroom, I'm pleasantly surprised to see that the layout of the room was that of a laboratory. Beakers, containers, different types of ores and various gadgets filled the room, making it all the more authentic.

I was somewhat relieved to see that there was no one I knew in this class, giving me a peace of mind. As students started filing in and sitting next to acquaintances and friends, a girl that looked to be about my age walked by and stood next to the stool besides mine.

"I-Is this seat taken? If it is I'll move somewhere else!" I don't know why she looked so panicked but I couldn't help chuckle at her innocent personality.

"Pff~ no the seat isn't taken. You're free to sit there if you wish." I say as I take a seat myself. The girl was ordinary to say the least. Her thick round glasses magnified her eyes and the freckles underneath them. Her curly hair looked like it had a life of its own as it was forcibly tied into a ponytail down her back.

Compared to girls like Tess and Kathryn whom everyone fawned over, and for good

reason, she was rather plain. But for some reason, I felt comfortable around her, which made me chuckle when she asked if the seat was taken.

“Th-thank you...” She muttered with her head faced down. “...mily”

“What was that?” I leaned in closer to hear her last sentence.

“Emily! My name is Emily Watsken! Please be my friend!” She looked at me with her eyes sparkling and her hand out.

Utterly baffled by her sudden enthusiasm, I manage a slight nod.

“S-sure. My name is Arthur Leywin.” I grasped her hands and couldn’t help but become surprised by how coarse her palm was.

“O-oh! I’m sorry! It must feel gross right?” She retracts her callused hand while her face turns a bit red, accentuating the freckles on her cheeks.

“No, it’s quite fine. I have calluses too. See?” I hold my sword hand out to reveal the hardened lumps on my palms

“Wow... you’re right! You must practice a lot! It’s no wonder you’re in the Discipline Committee. I really admire that! For me, I really love Artificing so I end up fiddling around with a lot gadgets, making my hands get this rough.” She scratches her head, her sentences becoming faster as she gets more comfortable with me

“Really? I rather admire people like you. I’m jealous that you have such a passion for Artificing. The only thing you get better at when fighting is how to destroy and kill, but the better you get at Artificing, the more things you can create.” I look down at my own, callused hands.

“Woah... that’s deep.” I see Emily readjust her thick glasses while she ponders in her head, what I just said.

“Haha, I ended up saying something unpleasant. I apologize.” The class was getting pretty loud as room filled up with eager students, most of which were here as a Scholar Mage.

“No no no! It wasn’t unpleasant at all! Just, it’s not something you hear every day from a twelve-year-old.” She desperately shakes her hands to gesture that it was okay.

“Pfft. You say that as if you aren’t a 12-year-old yourself.” I snicker as I look at her.

Slumping in her chair, she lets out a sigh. “True... It’s because I’m apparently a genius of some sorts. I don’t really get why people say that but people don’t really treat me as a child anymore after I created the projection display artifact.”

“Wait what? You’re the one that invented the display used to show the kings’ and queens’ announcement?” I stood up from my stool.

“Mhmm, well only a part of it... I tinkered around with some of the things in my parent’s lab and I made the basic designs of it a couple of years back.” She scratches her curly hair again.

Sinking back into my stool, I let out a deep breath. Holy crap. She built something like that when she wasn’t even 10!

“Well I must say that it is an honor to be in the presence of a genius such as yourself.” I give her a smirk, bowing my head in mock fealty.

“Oh please. Don’t you start now too! Besides, you’re quite famous too, you know!” She gives me a smirk as her glasses reflect the classroom light, making her look like an evil scientist.

“Really? I’ve tried very hard to lay low. I guess that didn’t work.” I lean my head on my hand.

“Pfft. Well joining the Disciplinary Committee as a first year sure didn’t help.”

“There are other first year students in the Committee as well.” I refute.

“But not humans! You and Princess Kathyln are the only ones, and the Princess has been hailed as a prodigy as soon as she awakened. That leaves you, a mysterious human freshman that has a bond with a white foxlike mana beast and no background, also able to overwhelm and completely demolish a professor that is a veteran Adventurer at the light yellow core stage.” By this time, she was leaning closer and closer to me.

“What? How do you already know about what happened with Professor Geist?! That literally happened 15 minutes ago!” “kyu!” Sylvie echoes in protest being called foxlike, although that’s essentially what she was.

“Don’t be so surprised! This is a Magic Academy after all. News travels fast and gossip travels even faster. I bet you some people in the class already know what happened.” She smirks while wagging her finger.

“Oh God... You know, I noticed you’re awfully talkative now compared to when you stuttered your greeting when you first came in.” I couldn’t help but realize the change in her personality.

“Shut up! I s-suck with strangers okay? Besides, I don’t get along with new people this easily. You’re different though! It was easy to get comfortable with you since we’re really similar.” She harrumphs, crossing her arms over her undeveloped chest.

“Similar in what way?” I raise a brow.

She grins broadly, “We’re both freaks!”

I roll my eyes at her conjecture but realized that, because of how high her intelligence was, I was more comfortable with her than other kids my age.

As I was about to respond to her statement, the classroom door swings open and I see a familiar face.

“Greetings plebeians! Please feel honored to have me, Professor Gideon, as your teacher for this class!” The crazy scientist skedaddled his way onto the podium while the pair of goggles that was hanging from his neck bounced up and down.

As he gazed through the classroom with a condescending eye, he eventually reached where Emily and I were sitting.

“AH! Well if it isn’t Arthur, I had no~ idea that you would be in my class!” He clasps his cheeks in an obviously fake way, making me shake my head.

“And my oh my, getting along with Miss Watsken! I must say you two would make quite the team! Good good! Let’s begin the first day of classes by a little introduction of myself!” He smiles, writing his name in big letters behind him.

The lecture continued on with Gideon rambling on about how remarkable he was for the following hour and a half. Most students, myself included, were half asleep but Emily’s eyes sparkled as she absorbed every bit of information that came out of Gideon’s thin lips. I guess even a genius like her respects Gideon in the field of

Artificing. Makes me almost want to admire him.

Sylvie was curled up on the desk in front of me, using my arm as a pillow, when an olive green owl suddenly flies in from the window, landing on my shoulder.

"Kyu!" Sylv jumps up in surprise and growls while the owl just calmly grooms itself.

"Well it seems like Director Goodsky is beckoning you, brat!" Gideon walks up to, massaging his hunched shoulders.

"You shouldn't keep her waiting. Shoo! Off you go!" He slaps my back as he continues on talking about how great he is.

Emily leans in, not surprised. "I told you not to underestimate how fast news travelled!"

"Yeah yeah..." I walk out of the classroom, hearing some of my classmates begin their discussion about what happened.

"Now... where was Director Cynthia's office again?" I scratch my head.

As if he understood, the owl flies off of my shoulder and begins flying towards a certain direction, gesturing us to follow.

"kyu!" 'Papa, he's dangerous!' Sylvie warns me, her fur on its end.

The campus was fairly empty as most of the students were either in class, training on their own, or in their dorms. Getting caught up in the beautiful scenery of this campus, I realized a little late that the owl had landed on a statue in front of a building that I assumed was the Director's office, waiting for me to enter.

Opening the door, I head inside while the horned owl perches itself on my shoulder again, making Sylvie hiss and throw paws at it in warning.

"I see that Avier has personally guided you here. Odd... I have never seen him get so comfortable with a stranger before." Professor Goodsky, who was sitting behind her desk, rested her head on her hands as she looked at me but studied Sylvie in particular.

"Is there something you needed from me, Director?" I take a seat in front of her desk as Avier, the green owl, flies off of my shoulder and onto the window ledge behind Cynthia.

“Yes. I called you here regarding the little ‘demonstration’ in Professor Geist’s class.” Her expression remains unfazed as she mentions the trouble I must’ve caused her.

“Ah... There were some situations regarding that actually...” Before I explain, Director Goodsky lifts up her hand to interrupt.

“We’ve just dismissed Professor Geist from our academy. Princess Kathyln personally came up and explained, telling me what exactly happened. Of course I had to get some people to verify with her testimony but everyone agreed that the Professor was putting the students in harm’s way.” She nodded, placing a couple of documents in front of me.

Wow, she worked fast. This incident happened less than two hours ago, but she already managed to handle and fire that Professor.

As if she knew what I was thinking, she smiles and answers, “It helps move things along when you get the final say in all matters regarding this Academy.”

“I have to say, though, that I have never seen the Princess so worked up as she was today. When she came in, she had a slightly angry expression on her face, which, by her standards, is quite serious. You must understand how surprised I was. Hoho!” Director Goodsky covers her mouth with a hand as she chuckles softly.

“Really now? I didn’t think that princess could even show emotions.” I grin as well.

“Yes. You must’ve made quite an impression on her because she defended you quite fervently, leaving Professor Geist no room to defend himself.” She gives me a wink.

When I shake my head helplessly, Director Goodsky just laughs, responding, “You’re quite the ladies’ man, Arthur. It’s going to be a problem if you steal the hearts of both Princesses! Who knows, you might be the cause of our next civil war! Hahaha!”

She seemed quite amused by something that could devastate the thin balance that this continent had. I wanted to just dismiss the thought, but when I imagine the two princesses fighting it out, I get shudders. I don’t think I have the mental capacity to handle even one of the princesses, let alone both of them.

“You know, it’s not really considered young to get married at the age of 14-15. I’m sure Tessia will have developed quite a bit by then.” She teases me even further.

“No thank you. I don’t see myself becoming romantically involved anytime soon. Besides, they’re still just kids. Maybe I’ll start thinking about it when the girls my age become a bit more mature.” I shrug.

Leaning forward, the Director studies me. “Hoho, the way you say it makes me think that you’ve already matured, Arthur.”

“Well, even you must admit that I happen to be a lot more mature than people my age.” Leaning back into the chair, I respond.

“True, but women do tend to mature faster than men.” Director Goodsky states matter-of-factly.

“I’m still wondering why I got called in here. I’m sure you didn’t just bring me here to tell me that everything was settled, and to tell me to get married.” Sylvie hopped off of my head and chased after Avier, who was grooming itself on the window.

“Arthur! I feel like you’re becoming to see me as someone who always has an ulterior plan at hand.” She gives me an offended look.

“Haha! I do because we’re awfully similar in that way, Director.” I give her a wink, making her smile as well.

“Dear me. If that is the case, then I believe that I’ve made the right decision.” She responds.

“What do you mean?”

“Arthur, what do you think about being the professor for your class, Practical Mana Manipulation?” She clasps her hand, studying my expression.

My eyes widen at this. “What? You’re not serious right?”

“Oh I’m quite serious, Arthur.” She says, her expression unfaltering.

“Is that even allowed? I’m a student. Can I be a student and a Professor at the same time? What about my other classes?” I begin shooting out arguments as to how this wouldn’t work.

“Please, no need to get so worked up. It’s quite simple actually. Is it allowed? Yes, as

long as I say it is. Although this specific situation has never occurred, there are cases of highly qualified upperclassmen that teach basic courses. As for your other classes, your schedule wouldn't really change. You would just be teaching that one class, for that period." She gives me a business-like smile.

I begin thinking. Director Goodsky wasn't doing this for her benefit. She would be sure to get a lot of complaints from noble parents protesting why a first year was teaching a class. I, on the other hand, would have a lot more time on my hand because teaching the course would require a lot less outside of class.

"I don't understand why you're doing this, Director."

"Well, a spot just opened up and you were the one that defeated the previous professor. Doesn't that give you enough qualifications to enter? Besides, I'm really not doing this for some ulterior motive, Arthur. You don't have to be too suspicious. This is up to you. I won't push you into this, but I believe that it would be a good opportunity to build a sort of standing for yourself without having to go around conquering Professors. If you wish to enjoy teaching after this semester, I can give you more classes to teach! I'm sure there are a very limited of classes that would be of use to you anyways." She chuckles.

She stands up, gently patting my shoulder. "The choice is yours."

Chapter 53

It's a Pleasure

Pondering over what she said, I just sat there, my eyes blankly staring at something off in the distance. Like she mentioned, there was no real benefit for her to have me as a Professor, which is why I find it so suspicious. It was so ingrained in me to be wary of people's motivation, whatever it was they did. I guess as a figure of authority and power, you become suspicious of everyone around you, which is why I couldn't figure out why she asked me to do this.

Practical Mana Manipulation was a class that didn't have any extra work to grade, which is why it might even be easier for me to just teach the class. Even if it wasn't easier, it did help build a good position for myself and would be a lot more interesting. Seeing as how I probably can't escape attention from the students anyway, I might as well do things a bit differently. Of course I don't plan on revealing my full set of skills to anyone just yet, but I don't see the point in trying to be completely inconspicuous anymore.

"...Arthur?" I get snapped out of my thoughts to see that Director Goodsky was looking at me with a rather worried expression.

"Ah yes. Although I'm not sure how competent I'd be, I'd like to try my hand at being a Professor." I look over the document stating my duties and responsibilities as a teacher.

"I'm sure you'll do an excellent job." She smiles.

Looking at her, I ask, "Were there any other classes that Professor Geist taught besides mine?"

"Fortunately, no. We hired him this year after he retired from being an Adventurer. For this semester, the other professors and I decided to only have him teach one class, as a sort of test run." She shakes her head at the pitiful results he produced.

"Before I sign, I have one last question." I state as I read over the final paragraph of the document.

“Go on.” She urges.

“Wouldn’t it be counterintuitive that I’m not allowed to hurt students but I’m part of the Disciplinary Committee?” I quiz.

“Ah, good question. The ‘not hurting students’ rule is for the inside of the classroom. While the situation is always investigated for every case, as long as it is for the safety of other students, using a certain degree of force to quell a fight or suppress a rampant student. As for outside of class during your Disciplinary Committee duties, I’ll trust your judgment on that.”

With that, I nod and sign the document. “I expect great things from you Arthur, and I’m sure I’m not the only one.” She gives me a gentle pat on the shoulder before ushering me to go eat lunch.

CYNTHIA GOODSKY’S POV:

“Whew, what is it about that boy that always keeps me on my toes. Negotiating with him is more heart straining than dealing with the Royal Families. What was your take on him, Avier?” My bond gently lands on the arm I held out, his intelligent eyes pondering what to say.

“He is... different. Do not view Arthur Leywin as a child. Whether it is mental acuity or emotional maturity, there is much more to him than the eye can see.” The clear words that came out of my bond didn’t seem natural from the movement of his beak.

“What makes you so certain?” I lean back in my seat.

“His bond. That white fox’s true form should be a dragon...”

I bolt up from my seat. “What?! How is that possible? How do you know?”

“It is because we are of the same kind. I may be a lesser species of dragons but Wyverns are still part of the same family as Dragons.” Avier goes back to grooming himself.

“Are you saying that bond of his is more powerful than you?” I couldn’t help but be utterly baffled by all of this.

“No, that child has yet to mature. She shouldn’t have hatched more than a few of years ago. However, I suspect that when she does develop, she will not be comparable to the likes of me.” He states matter-of-factly.

I couldn’t imagine anyone stronger than Avier. The fact that he was my bond was only because he grew a liking to me when I happened by him, deep in the Beast Glades. He usually does his own thing and I don’t dare treat him like pet, but the fact that Arthur’s bond was actually a dragon and that it was so subservient to him makes me wonder what that boy really was.

“Do not make him your enemy, Cynthia. If treated with trust and respect, he will become the greatest ally, but if betrayed, he may be the cause of this Continent’s demise.” With that warning, Avier flies off.

I lean forward on my seat, rubbing my throbbing temples as I recall what happened a couple of hours back.



Boom

“Director Goodsky, I request that you remove a boy named Arthur Leywin from my class!”

“Professor Geist, you look shaken up. What’s wrong?” I’m taken by surprise by the sudden intrusion.

“The boy has no respect for me, his Professor! Please do not listen to any of the rumors that you may hear. I’m being framed.” The man’s wide face is filled with desperation and anger.

Knock *Knock*

“Please come in.” I state. At least this person had the decency to knock.

“I apologize for the intrusion, Director.” The petite Kathyln gives me a small bow before walking up next to the, now pale faced, Professor.

“What’s the matter, Kathyln?” I lean forward, taking a look at the both of them.

“This sorry excuse for a Professor needs to be expelled.” She says, expressionlessly.

Professor Geist grabs Kathyln by the arm, pulling her close to him. “HOW DARE YOU! Sorry excuse? Me?”

“You dare touch me with your filthy hand?” Her expression doesn’t change, as she somehow seems to be looking down at Professor Geist.

“Professor, I suggest you immediately remove your hand, or else, whatever the case may have been, it will not be in your favor.” I stand up at this point. Using force to get your point across is deplorable.

“Ahem... as I was saying. Please do not take to heart the rumors that you may hear. I swear that this was all a misunderstanding and that I’m being framed.” He immediately let go of Kathyln’s arm before talking.

“I have not yet heard of any rumors. Do you mind indulging me, Kathyln?”

“This scum dares to pick on students to feel good about himself. Even ignoring the fact that he utterly humiliated Feyrith, if Arthur didn’t step in, I would’ve...” Without finishing her last sentence, she glares at the Professor.

I turn to Professor Geist, who was desperately denying this accusation. “I’m telling you that it was a misunderstanding. I simply wanted to demonstrate in front of the class the level that the Disciplinary Committee is at; you know, for the other students to know.”

“If that was simply what this was, then there would be no reason for you to come into my room and insist that Arthur be removed from your class.” I couldn’t help but sigh internally at the thought of handling this dilemma.

“Tricia, please gather information for me from Professor Geist’s class regarding this incident.” My secretary bows before running off.

“Now, please be patient as this is figured out. I will do my best to be just about this.” Before I’m able to dismiss the two of them, Princess Kathyln walks up to me.

“I trust that you will handle this fairly, but just know that, if it wasn’t for Arthur, you wouldn’t be handling this Professor’s ethic case but a Student’s injury case, MY injury case. I bid you good day, Director.” She turns around, completely ignoring Professor

Geist, who was taken aback by her last statement.



Recalling the testimonies I received, it seemed like Arthur completely overwhelmed Professor Geist. While this professor's personality never did sit well with me, his skills were more than enough to teach a basic mana manipulation class. Even while being a light yellow core Augmenter, and quite a capable one at that, he was completely defeated by a 12 year old.

I let out a sigh in regret that I didn't measure the level of the boy's core while he was just here.

A twelve-year-old defeating a veteran Adventurer using only his wind and earth attribute mana, which I remember him mentioning were his weakest, and also having a bond with a dragon. What more was there to him? If I ask, would he tell me?

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

"Art! Over here!" I see Elijah waving at me across the dining hall.

I notice he was sitting with a girl when I went over.

"This is Charlotte! Charlotte, this is my best friend and roommate, Arthur Leywin." He stands up, gesturing the both of us to shake hands.

"Hi Arthur, I've heard a lot about you." She gave a coquettish smile while twiddling her hair.

"Mmm... It's a pleasure." I respond brusquely before focusing my attention on Elijah.

"How were your classes?" I ask my friend while I feed Sylvie a piece of broccoli.

"Kyu!" 'noo!'

"Aww~ your little mana beast is so cute! Do you mind if I pet it?" Charlotte gets awfully close to me, almost leaning on me while she reaches up on top of my head.

Before she gets the chance to pet the growling Sylvie, I grab her wrist.

“Sorry, she doesn’t like strangers touching her.” I look her dead in the eye, making her blush by how close her face was to mine.

“O-oh, I’m sorry!” She shrinks back, focusing back on the food.

Seemingly ignorant of what was happening, Elijah responds, his mouth full of food. “Classes were great! I especially like my basic chain-casting class and mana utilization class. Although for mana utilization, I feel like the professor that’s teaching is going over the exact same thing that you’re telling me to do. By the way, I met Charlotte in my chain-casting class! She’s really good!”

“Haha, please, you’re making me blush.” Charlotte puts on a bashful face as she squirms in her seat.

“...”

“Anyways, how were your classes! I’ve heard you already beat up a professor! What happened to keeping it cool man?” He gives me a smirk while he points his fork at me accusingly.

“Yeah, about that, so I ended up becoming a Professor for that class.” I respond coolly, shoving a piece of meat in my mouth while avoiding Sylvie’s attempts at trying to steal it.

“PFFFFFFFFFFFFF”

“kya!”

Elijah splutters the food he was chewing on towards us as I instinctively lean back, trying to get out of range.

“Elijah, that’s gross.” I wipe some of the stray food particles that I didn’t manage to avoid from my face.

“Sorry sorry... what? You’re going to be a Professor?” He wipes his mouth before trying to wipe Charlotte’s face, Charlotte rejecting the offer.

“Mm... I ended up replacing the Professor that was teaching the class. So you may now

call me Professor Leywin." I smirk at my friend.

"Professor, my ass. But maybe I should ditch my class sometimes and go to yours. It'd be interesting to see you teach." He retorts back.

As we continued talking, I was growing annoyed at the flirting attempts from Charlotte, and even more annoyed by the fact that Elijah was clueless about this all.

"Oh yeah! Charlotte and I were going to go downtown Academy to do some shopping. Do you want to join us?" He asks nonchalantly.

"Yes! Arthur you should join us." She leans in closer again. There was a small strip on the corner of the Academy where there were fancy restaurants and cafes, along with shopping booths for the rich nobles to spoil themselves in. With that, you could imagine how enormous the Academy was.

"I have three more classes, remember? I'm taking the upper division classes after lunch."

Elijah just shrugs at this. "Oh yeah, I forgot. No big deal! I guess it'll just be me and Charlotte."

Charlotte smiles awkwardly at Elijah's happy-go-lucky face and responds, "Ah sorry. I totally forgot that I had different plans. I'm so sorry! We should definitely go next time, though! All three of us! Bye."

With that, she walks off, leaving my friend and I alone at the small dining table.

"I guess she was really busy." Elijah looked a bit disappointed.

Oh Elijah...

Leaning close, he asks me in a serious voice. "So, what did you think about Charlotte? She's pretty, huh! Do you think I have a shot at her?"

Oh Elijah...

"I think you can do better, buddy." I patted my clueless friend on the back as we walk out of the dining hall together.

Elijah decided that he wanted to go to the library after his plans suddenly washed away, so after walking him there on the way, I made my way to my first upper division class, Team-Fighting Mechanics I.

The classroom, or should say field to be more accurate, was on the other side of the Academy, where all of the upper division classes were held.

The “room” consisted of a huge grass field with several obstacles placed randomly, encased by high walls with runes engraved on them. On top of one of the walls was a separate little room protected by a glass encasing. I assumed that the room was used to be a viewing platform for the rest of the students.

I see some students arrived before me talking to each other and I immediately notice some familiar figures

“Ah! I didn’t know you’d be in an upper division class, Arthur.” Curtis Glayder waves at me as soon as he realized who I was. Grawder, Curtis’ bond was lying with his eyes closed right next to him.

“Yeah, I didn’t think I’d have a class with you. Please take care of me.” I grasp his hand.

“Good to see you again, Arthur!” Claire Bladeheart puts her arm around my neck while smiling brightly. “We have to do our best not to embarrass the Disciplinary Committee, right?”

“Haha, I’ll do my best. Is this everyone that’s going to be in the class?” I reply, turning back to Curtis. I heard that this class had a fairly small number of students, and that it was one of the most popular classes.

“Hmmm, there should be a few... ah, there they come!” Looking back, I see several more students and I couldn’t help but smile wearily.

“Princess Tessia is as beautiful as always, isn’t she?” I hear one of the students murmur.

Walking this way amongst the small group of students was Tessia Eralith, my childhood friend, and Clive Graves, the Student Vice President.

She notices me and I could tell she was about to greet me but she notices that I have an older woman’s arm around my neck, so instead she shoots me a glare before snapping her head away, pouting.

Clive, oblivious of why she got angry, straight up gives me the death glare as his narrow eyes become even sharper.

“Good afternoon, Princess Tessia!” Not bothering to remove the arm around my neck, Claire smiles and waves at Tess.

“Pleasure.” She responds, her expression fierce.

After she walks past us, she secretly sneaks in a pinch to my side, jolting me up.

“Hmm, I wonder if she’s in a bad mood today.” Claire ponders.

It’s because of you!

Removing her arm around my neck, I turn to see someone behind in the back of the group. As soon as I recognize who it was, my face starts burning in anger while my clenched fists turn white. It was Lucas Wykes.

Chapter 54

Match Start

My body couldn't help but tremble in suppressed anger at the thought of being in the same class as that brat Lucas; and of all classes, a team fighting class. The sick irony of having that traitor in a class focused on learning team cohesion in battles almost makes me want to laugh.

Our eyes met but he looked at me apathetically, like I was an insect on the ground.

"Good! Everyone's here!" A loud voice suddenly booms over the field. As all of the students start turning their heads to locate where the voice came from, I look straight up to see a massive hawk-like mana beast hovering over the field.

This beast was at least 4 meters long and its wingspan was well over 8 meters. With its sharp talons tucked underneath it, the beast slowly made its descent, revealing a well-toned woman with a giant sword strapped to her back, standing up on the back of the hawk.

"Welcome! My name is Professor Glory and I will be the one teaching all of you brats! This Flare Hawk is Torch, my precious bond."

The first thing I did was measure the stage our professor's mana core was at, but upon trying to inspect her level, I felt a sudden sharp pain in my head as Professor Glory whipped her gaze at me. Giving me a confident smile, she gazed down to my direction. Hopping off of her Flare Hawk, she makes her way around the group of students in her class. Studying each of the students she passes, she takes a closer look at some of them before making her way towards me.

It wasn't unusual for mages to build defenses around their core stages, especially the higher level ones. It was also lot more difficult to hide which element they use, since the mana particles of their element naturally surrounded them. Most don't find the need to hide their elemental attribute so it wasn't a big deal even if they couldn't, but needless to say, it was surprising to see how strong Professor Glory's defenses were.

I couldn't tell what her core stage was or even her elemental attribute. While I got the

hang of masking my core stage level, I needed to use seals in order to completely hide my elemental attributes. I wasn't sure whether she used seals like I did in order to hide her abilities but one thing for sure is that she knew I was the one inspecting her.

"I have to say, you guys have set the bar pretty high for all of the other classes." She announces after inspecting Lucas. She took quite a bit longer to inspect the Disciplinary Committee and the Student Council Members, nodding every once in a while.

"Well if it isn't my newest colleague, Arthur Leywin. It's a pleasure to meet you." Professor Glory gives me a playful grin, as if she was itching to tease me.

The students start murmuring amongst the group in confusion at her greeting.

"Professor Glory, what do you mean by colleague?" One of the upperclassman males raised his hand.

"Ah! Most of you have probably seen him from the commencement this morning but this boy is a freshman Disciplinary Committee Officer. A real prodigy if I do say so myself. He's also a newly appointed Professor for the Practical Mana Manipulation class that you guys all took during your underclassman years." She gives me a firm pat to my back.

""""WHAT?!!""""

"You can't be serious, Professor!"

"If that brat is a professor then I'm the king of this Continent!"

"What has this academy turned into, to accept a freshman as a professor?"

"How is that even possible? Even the best upperclassmen these days don't get picked to be professors, but that first year did?"

Various noises of protests make me sigh. They were bound to find out eventually but it would've taken the upper classmen a bit longer to find out this news, considering they don't really get much communication dealing with lower division classes.

"GRRRR~" Sylvie has her fur standing on its end as she growls warningly at the group of students. 'Papa is stronger than all of you combined!'

Everyone has seen Sylvie by now, whether it was passing through the Academy or at the Commencement ceremony earlier today so no one really cared much about the tiny mana beast on my head that could turn big enough to gnaw on their bodies.

“Now now! Before we jump straight into complaints, we should have more faith in the Director’s decision. He has qualified to some degree by beating the professor that taught the class previously!” She shoots me a wink.

“But Professor Glory! The underclassman professors aren’t all that great anyway! I bet some of the upperclassmen students here could beat most of them!” Another round of complaints issue on, making me grow sleepy. Must be the food coma from lunch.

“Haha! To be honest, I’m itching to test how strong you really are, boy! Unfortunately, Director Goodsky made it clear for us to not do that. So! These students here will test you in my place!” She puts her hands on her hip, grinning in anticipation.

By now, I see a sudden raging fire burning in some of the male student’s eyes as they look at me. I can almost see the words that they’re thinking etched into their face.

‘I’m going to kill this bastard.’

‘Who does this brat think he is?’

‘Murder, murder, murder, murder... ’

‘I’m jealous. Why is he good looking too? He needs to die.’

The female students, on the other hand have a look in their eyes that scare me even more. Their stares remind me of hyenas looking at fresh meat as they almost drool over the ‘goods’ that I suddenly became to them.

Taking a glance at Tess, I notice that she has a surprised look on her face, her lips curling slightly in pride, but when she notices that I’m looking at her, she quickly glances away, but I did notice her ears were a little red.

Sigh, you know... it’s not weird for you to talk to me.

Clive, on the other hand, is scowling in contempt while Lucas is looking at me with his brow raised in renewed interest, as if I got promoted from an insect to a mammal.

“Director Goodsky told me to take it easy on my upper division classes until I adjust to school. This is my first day after all.” I try to ease my way out of this. Fighting against these hormonal teenagers wasn’t going to end well.

muttering the possible candidates when a hand is raised up.

“Professor. How about having the Student Council President and I as their opponent.” Clive raises his hand up high as he makes his suggestion.

“What?” Tessia turns her head to Clive in surprise. Before she has the chance to object, however, Professor Glory clasps her hands.

“OHH! NOW things are getting interesting! But it would unfair to have only the two of you versing the three of them.” She looks around the group of students.

“I think the President and I will suffice if the immediate loss rule affecting Arthur Leywin is implemented. He says seriously.

“I’ll volunteer to be on the Student Council team.” Lucas Wykes says calmly while leaning on his staff.

“Hmmm, Mr. Wykes, our other genius freshman... Very well! It would be a good chance to see your abilities in action as well!” I could tell she had a twinge of doubt. Maybe she heard some rumors about him.

““Aww.”” Some of the other students were disappointed that they didn’t get the chance to beat me up and be on the same team as the Student Council President but everyone was excited to see the match.

“The match will have a time limit of 30 minutes, where we will have a short discussion and a breakdown of it afterwards. Please gear up!” With that, a pile of what looked like exercise gear dropped to the ground out of Professor Glory’s dimension ring.

Turning serious, she begins explaining. “These are special equipment designed by artificers to measure the amount of damage that is dealt. This equipment will activate, releasing a shrill noise, if the damage it takes passes the threshold that’s encrypted into it. If anyone chooses to ignore this warning and continues to fight or cast spells, it will lead to immediate expulsion from my class and other possible consequences regarding your stay here as a student. This rule goes for any upper division fighting class in this Academy so engrave this rule into your guys’ brains. All of you are all at the level where protecting yourselves with mana shouldn’t be a problem. Let me reiterate this but, these equipments don’t protect you so don’t rely on it as a source of protection.” She announces to everyone else in the class as well.

Clearing her throat, Professor Glory shouts. "Do I make myself clear!?"

""""""""YES!""""""""

"Good! Now, the six of you gear up." She gets back on her bond while the rest of the students head towards the viewing platform.

Curtis come up to me and pats my back before picking up his gear. "Well, it seems like we're going to have an early practice session! Let's do our best, Arthur. I still remember you wanting a sword back then for practicing as a hobby. Let's see how good you are!"

"We can't embarrass the DC name now, can we? I'll make practice extra hard for anyone who doesn't meet standards!" Claire grins evilly while grabbing her gear.

Clive and Lucas walk past me, ignoring me as I go after them to pick up my gear. The gear consists of a tight jacket and a series of straps that I wrap around my legs. The jacket also had sleeves made of some special straps that I was supposed to wrap around my arms.

I was having trouble putting on the arm wraps when Tessia silently comes up and helps me bind the straps around my right arm.

"Is it okay for Princess Tessia to be helping me like this?" I smirk while letting her help me.

Shooting me a glare, she tightens the straps, jerking my arm towards her. "Can it, Mr. Genius. They're over there anyways. Sigh... I can't stand acting like I don't know you." Her gaze softens.

"You know, they're going to find out eventually. Why try so hard hiding it?" I shrug.

"You mean... you don't care? Grandma Cynthia mentioned to me about you wanting to keep a low profile so I thought..." Her face loses composure as she starts stuttering.

"Pff... Well I haven't been doing a very good job of that, now have I?" I couldn't help but snicker, confusing Tess even more.

"It's okay. There are just a few things I mainly wanted to hide. As long as those remain a secret, the rest doesn't really matter. For one, do you notice anything?" I stick out my

chest to let her analyze me.

"I don't get what... Ah! I can't sense your- mfff." She was getting too loud so I had to cover her mouth. Leaning closer to her face, I whisper. "Yup, that and Sylvie's true identity as well. I'm keeping most of my abilities a secret for now so you have to do your part as well. Maybe keeping the fact that I visited your kingdom a secret might be a good idea but you don't have to ignore me, Tess." I let go of her mouth and pat her head, making her flush and push me away from her.

"Y-you're too c-close." Tess mutters under her breath as she's facing down.

"Are you guys done flirting over there?" Professor Glory's voice from above surprises the both of us as I quickly finish adjusting the straps.

"Ah! Arthur. I suggest you leave your bond in a safer place if she's not capable of assisting you during the battle like Curtis' bond." She points towards the viewing platform.

"Kyu!" Sylvie cries in protest.

"I think it'll be better for you to sit this one out, Sylv." I say while patting her small head."

'Aww... Okay.' She jumps off my head before scurrying off out of the field.

Tess just finished putting on her gear as I went up to her. "Let's both do our best. I want to see how much you improved."

Giving me a confident smile, she says back, "You better watch out then" before running off to the other side of the field where Clive and Lucas were.

I head towards where Curtis and Claire were situated. Claire was stretching while Curtis was mounted on top of his World Lion, Grawder.

"Even with Grawder, we're still at a disadvantage because they have two Conjurers and Clive is a long range Augmenter. The fact that it's an instant loss for us if your gear activates gives us a seriously limited set of options." Claire was leaning on her unsheathed sword while stretching her leg back.

"You're right. Claire and I don't really know anything about your fighting style so we'll match your pace. We'll take priority in protecting you while we get in range to do some damage." Curtis responds while petting Grawder.

I look for Tess, Clive and Lucas and spot them a few dozen meters away. Seems like we're going to be target practice for them until we get in range. This should be fun.

I couldn't help but grin as my blood boils. It should feel good giving Lucas a few good blows during the match, although I can only imagine that both Lucas and Clive thinking the same thing.

I take out my blade, Dawn's Ballad, making sure to not take out its sheath, as both Curtis and Claire ready their weapons as well.

Whistles

"That's a beautiful sword you have there, Arthur." Claire stares at my blade.

I have to admit that Curtis looks pretty damn impressive wielding his dual double-edged swords while mounting his bond.

Claire releases a fierce battle aura as she infuses both wind and fire attribute mana into her body.

I turn forward as well, imbuing wind and earth mana into my body and sword. My hair and clothes flutter as the ground beneath me pulses to my command.

Professor Glory's powerful voice echoes through the battlefield, signaling us to begin.

"LET THE MATCH COMMENCE!"

Chapter 55

This Is Going To Hurt

On Professor Glory's signal, the three of us dashed forward. Curtis, who was mounted on top of Grawder, was to my left as Claire was on my right side, both a bit ahead of me.

Tessia, Clive and Lucas all split up as soon as we charged. Tess circled around the left side as she prepared to take on Curtis, while Clive dashed around the right side to confront Claire before she reached him.

Straight ahead, I see Lucas calmly waiting for me, his face twisted into a haughty sneer that seemed to say 'I don't need to get ready for you'. Whether it was at the Dire Tombs or even now, Lucas' arrogance had no limit. I still remember when he betrayed us by using us as live bait so he could escape. Even then, he had the same sneer that he had now.

Tessia was probably going to beat Curtis and I wasn't sure who was stronger between Claire and Clive but I'll worry about that later. Wind and Earth bent to my will as I infuse more mana, activating mana rotation as well. Lucas wasn't weak. His mana pool was bigger than mine, but that didn't mean he's stronger than me.

"Will you be all right by yourself against Lucas?" I hear Curtis shout as he dashes towards Tess.

Claire looks back at me in slight worry as well until I give them a silent nod. She nods back and focuses on the Student Vice President.

Lucas senses a bit of the killing intent I purposely let out to shock him out of his pedestal as he begins quietly chanting a spell while dashing backwards to get more distance between us.

Soaring up ahead, I feel Professor Glory's keen eyes studying me as I close the gap between Lucas and I. I take a deep breath and block out everything else. As far as I was concerned, this was a fight between only Lucas and I. Narrowing my eyes in utmost concentration, each powerful step that I take creates small craters in the ground while

the wind whistles around me.

Lucas lets out a chortle before he releases his spell. "Inferno's Cage!"

The spell reminded me of the Ember Wisps spell that both Lucas and Ex-Professor Geist used but it was a lot bigger. The orbs scattered and floated in place around the both of us, creating a dome made of fire.

Don't tell me...

With a confident smirk, he snaps his finger and utters, "activate".

The orbs glowed in response before spewing out bullets of fire. If it was a spell on the level of Ember Wisp, I would be able to close the gap while dodging the fireballs, but this was insane. Dozens of fire blasts were locked in on my position and fired at a constant rate coming from all different directions. If I didn't train my body and fighting techniques during my time as an Adventurer, I doubt that, no matter how fast I was, I would be able to dodge everything. Without even giving me a chance to take a step closer to my target, I was forced to dodge and block every incoming missile constantly bombarding me.



Inferno's Cage... whoever came up with this spell deserves a sword up the ass to feel what a pain this is to deal with. Not to mention the constant fireballs and streams of flames that were locked in on me, the heat inside this dome was wearing me down. Without my fire attribute mana or my water attribute mana, there was no direct way to counter the heat inside. Using fire attribute mana to make my body more immune to fire or even using water attribute mana to directly cool my body were both out of the question.

"Keep running around, monkey. Do you think it's even possible for the peasants of the mages to actually have a chance against someone like me? I can't wait to step on you to crush whatever speck of confidence you had just because you became a DC member and a Professor. I thought this class would be a waste of time but I know why I was brought here. It was to crush you." His little pretty boy face was wrenched into an ugly face as he sneered.

'Are you okay, Papa?' Sylvie's concerned voice echoed into my head after feeling how

frustrated I was at the moment.

‘Yeah, I’m fine Sylv. Don’t worry about me. How’s everyone else doing?’ I send back.

‘Mama is winning against Curtis and Claire is winning against that serious looking guy.’ She responds.

‘Okay, just tell me if something unusual happens.’ I turn my focus back to the fight. Dodging the flame bullets and the occasional streams of fire was easy but I couldn’t get closer to Lucas. I would release a wind blade and some spikes of earth at Lucas but either the orbs that made up the dome destroyed it or Lucas just blocked the spell with one of his.

What was with this kid’s mana pool? Did he not have a limit to how long he could keep this spell up? No, calm down, Arthur. You don’t want to be impatient. Think. How can I use wind? Wind? What is wind? It’s the movement of air, right? What’s air? Oxygen? Nitrogen? So am I able to control oxygen and nitrogen as well? If so, how?

I was growing frustrated at my lack of comprehension in my wind and earth elements. Now was a good as time as any to try and comprehend. It wasn’t just enough to shoot wind bullets or wind blades because Lucas had already prepared several levels of fire shields around himself.

I wasn’t thinking outside of the box when I used wind. Even with mana rotation, I don’t have the necessary mana to form a tornado big enough to swallow the fire shooting at me, and even if I did, I don’t think I’d be able to last longer than Lucas. What was I missing?

“Keep squirming! I’m sure I can get away with it if a couple of fireballs land on you even after your gear activates. You know, since I can’t cancel the blasts from the orbs once it’s been released.” He just shrugs nonchalantly as the shields around him block any spells I fire at him.

Think Arthur. Let’s focus on fire. What does fire need for it keep burning? It needs oxygen. Can I get rid of the oxygen around me so that the fire can’t reach me? Then what would happen to me? Would I be able to breathe?

PROFESSOR GLORY'S POV:

Hmmm... Lucas... he's better than I what I've heard. Inferno's Cage is a pretty tough spell to master, yet he was able to cast it while running backwards. Seriously, he's barely 13 and he can already use a domain type spell. Haa... the world sure is coming to a change, with a half elf like him using fire attribute magic, the ice princess, Kathyln, and even Princess Tess were all monsters. I get shivers down my back imagining how strong they'll become by the time they graduate from here.

But that brat, Arthur... What the hell was he? Lucas Wykes, since he awakened a few years back thanks to his elf lineage, I can sort of understand the level of control he has with his spells. Tessia Eralith, her being a pure lineage elf from the royal family guarantees that her skills are a few levels above anyone anywhere near her age. Kathyln Glayder, her insane mana pool and her natural compatibility with Ice attribute is what makes her a prodigy but her control and battle sense is still lacking from the fact that she hasn't awakened too long ago, but Arthur?

As soon as he flashed through the field to confront Lucas, I felt cold sweat. The way both the wind and earth around him naturally gravitated and danced around him. He wasn't controlling the elements to his commands like typical mages do. No, he was in perfect harmony with the mana surrounding him, as if he was moving his limbs.

Seems like that brat Lucas is taking Arthur seriously. Good thing too or he probably would've lost instantly. Currently, the spell Inferno's Cage encompassed both Arthur and Lucas in a large dome of fire. I can tell Lucas is a bit worn out after using it, but this was a continuous spell that he could leave activated until he runs out of mana, which I don't feel will happen anytime soon. The dome made up of tiny orbs of fire was like a death trap used by Conjurers to gain the advantage against Augmenters or agile mana beasts.

The tiny orbs can shoot out beams and bullets of fire anywhere inside the dome, leaving the Augmenter occupied enough so the Conjurer can cast more spells.

I focus my gaze over to Curtis Glayder and Tessia Eralith. As expected, Curtis was having a hard time. I had the chance to observe the Elf Princess practice with our Director once, and I had to say, the way she battled was exquisite. She was a Conjurer but her staff was actually a sharp blade, made of a special wood that was lighter but harder than most metals. Casting buffs on herself and using spells in synch to her movement, she danced around the vines she conjures with a speed faster than even

some trained Augmenters from the wind aiding each motion and action.

She fights in a mixed style of both conjuring spells and using close combat so she had no notable weakness. Compared to my masculine way of fighting, I can only admire how graceful and beautiful her style of combat is.

Claire Bladeheart, on the other hand, was gaining the advantage on our Student Vice President. Clive is a rare long range Augmenter that wields a short bow capable of firing arrows at an almost unbelievably fast pace. Usually, he would be at an advantage against most Augmenters but Claire was a bad match up for him. Miss Bladeheart's style mimicked that stick, Kaspian. With her dual elements, she creates spears of wind and fire from her rapier. She has yet to reach his level but with constant training, I'm confident she can surpass her uncle.

I turn my attention back to the most intense battle, which was definitely Arthur's and Lucas'. I notice that most of the students were watching their fight as well, all in awe from both of their abilities.

"Hmm?" I couldn't help raise an eyebrow at what was happening. That's strange. Arthur is getting hit the fireballs now. At this rate, even with protection from mana, his gear is going to activate.

He was dodging it so effortlessly just a minute ago too. I focus more mana into my eyes to get a better look. The dome of fire surrounding them blocks a lot of the view but I can still sort of make out the fight. It seems like Arthur is trying to do something. Is he holding his breath? What was he trying to do in this situation?

"Torch! Fly down a bit lower!" My bond descends as he angles his massive wings to keep himself level.

As we slowly circle around the huge fire dome that surrounded a third of the field, I began noticing some changes. Around him, for every three or four fire blast that scraped or hit him, one would completely extinguish before it reached him.

"No..." A smile crept up on my face as I continued observing him.

"Don't tell me he's actually trying to learn how to manipulate air in this situation right now..." I cover my mouth as I continue to smile in wonder. "That little monster... he has guts, I'll give him that."

Air manipulation is a variation of wind magic, albeit a much harder one. Breaking

down the components of any element and trying to directly manipulate it is something only the most keen and sensitive mages can do, and that's while meditating in a perfectly calm and peaceful environment. After years of practice through meditation, the mage might begin experimenting in real life situations like incorporating it into spells.

The blue fire technique was a perfect example of that. It takes years of meditation to reach the stage of being able to stably summon blue flames and even longer to do it fast enough for it be of use in actual battles.

This little beast was skipping a few steps and trying to incorporate a completely new technique in the middle of a battle? My hands were trembling in excitement at the thought of being able to witness the development of a mage that can perhaps become the pinnacle of power in this school, no maybe even this Continent!

"GROOOOAAAAAARR!" Turning my attention to where the roar came from, it seemed like Princess Tessia and Prince Glayder's battle was reaching its climax.

Curtis Glayder's uniform is full of small gashes and nicks. I must admit that Curtis has done fairly well against the only disciple of our Director Goodsky, although it was most likely because of his bond that he was able to last this long.

"You've forced me to do this Princess Eralith! Please be careful! PHASE ONE! KING'S WRATH!" I hear Prince Glayder roar as his body glows.

Oh! He's activated the acquire phase of his beast's will. Curtis rarely chooses to use his beast's ability because he doesn't really consider it his own power. I had to hand it to him for having the right mentality. It's said that some beast tamers choose to only use their unique powers instead of honing their own. Because of that, while still strong, they never really improve themselves in the long run. In order to utilize the most of the Beast Will, the user himself needs to strengthen his own power.

As he activates his Beast Will's first phase, a noticeable transformation occurs in him. While the amount of visible change differs by the person, Prince Glayder's change is visibly apparent. Both his deep red spiky hair and eyebrows became longer and messier while the straps that wrapped around his arms tightened from his muscles expanding. His extended canines became visible as he roared.

Whistles

This sight never fails to impress me.

When I shift my gaze to Princess Tessia, though, who was standing on top of a series of vines, her face looked unnaturally pale. That's odd, it didn't look like she took any damage.

I was quite a bit away from Tessia and Curtis' battle since I was encircling Lucas and Arthur's, but with mana infused eyes, I can make out even the beads of sweat rolling down the Princess' face.

"This is my most powerful attack. If you can take this on, I'll admit my defeat! Please prepare yourself!" Prince Glayder's voice became a lot louder and huskier after activating his beast's will. He was a ferocious sight to behold on top of his bond, Grawder.

"WORLD HOWL!" A serious amount of mana gathered in front of the mouth of Prince Glayder as he invoked his breath attack. The world lion had a powerful move that they used as a last resort against enemies more powerful than them. It was a beam of condensed earth attribute mana that could shred anything in its way if not blocked properly.

A little worried, I look at Tessia again and I can see her mumble an incantation when the worst scenario happens.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

Goddamn it! This is frustrating as hell! I can only grimace and try harder as I continue to try and manipulate the air molecules surrounding me. I've had little success so far but I feel like I'm onto something here. Lucas, noticing this, clicks his tongue and starts chanting spells again.

"Flame Guardians!" He shouts.

I let out a small grin as I realize he's reaching his limit. Then again, so was I, or more accurately, so was my combat equipment. I wasn't sure when this thing would start screaming its alarm so I had to finish this fast.

As the flame soldiers gain on me, Sylvie's worried voice booms in my head 'PAPA!

Something's wrong with Mama! She's going to get hit by a powerful attack and she's not doing anything! This is really bad! Should I go help, Papa?

Dammit!

'NO! You can't do anything while you're in that form!' I shout back in my head.

I can sense the feeling of desperation from Sylvie, making me all the more anxious.

"NOOO!!"

I take a quick glance up to where I heard Professor Gloria's scream and notice she went full speed to where Tess and Curtis was.

'Papa! She's not going to make it in time!' Sylvie echoes back, sounding even more worried than before.

Dammit!

Dragon's Will, Phase one. Static Void.

My knees almost give upon activation of the first phase of Sylvia's Beast Will as the color of everything is inverted. This ability to shift myself outside of the world's time and space came with a limit. I couldn't affect anything outside of myself unless I choose to bring it in here with me.

"I don't have time." I say to myself.

As I dash through the gap between the orbs that made up the dome created by Inferno's Cage, I pass by the frozen Professor on top of her mount, Torch.

Quite a bit ahead I see Tessia as she's already fainted and falling from the conjured vine she was standing on, clutching her abdomen as a massive breath attack released by Glayder was almost upon her.

Sylvie was right. If I left it to Professor Gloria, she wouldn't have made it in time. I could only purse my lips in dread as I imagine my precious friend dying.

I sped up, my vision growing blurry as I run out of energy. I was almost at my limit.

Fuck. Hold on, Arthur. You can do this.

I make my final dash towards the area Curtis and Tess were fighting and as I jump off a crumbled vine, I wrap my body around Tess and create a barrier around the both of us with the little mana I had left.

Haa... This is going to hurt.

I release my first phase and as the world reverts back into it's original color, I feel a tremendous searing pain on my back. Before I could even scream, my vision fades and the last thing I hear before passing out is the shrill sound of my gear activating.

Chapter 56

Family Gathering

PROFESSOR GLORY'S POV:

I'm too late! Fuck! What happened to her? Why did she suddenly collapse? Is something wrong with her mana core? Why now?

I could only watch in horror as Prince Curtis' breath attack made its way towards Princess Tessia. With absolute no defenses around her, was she going to live? If so, would she even be able to continue being a mage? Forget mage, she might have to live the rest of her life as a cripple!

I could feel tears well up in my eyes as I desperately made my way towards them, but I knew I wasn't going to make it. What would the consequences be? I would be happy if it just ended with me getting fired. I was more concerned that this would start a civil war. During this important time period in the Continent, was I going to be the cause of the split between the three races?

"BOOOOOOOOOM!"

"NOOOO!!" I scream in dread as Curtis' World Howl engulfed the Princess. Prince Glayder had a look of shock in his face as well when he realized after releasing his attack that Tessia was already unconscious. There was no way, though. There was no way to stop the attack.

After what seemed like hours, the beam slowly dissipated and what I saw shocked me even more than the worst possible scenario I imagined.

In utter incredulity, I just stammered. "A-A-Arthur Leywin?!?"

How the hell did he get there? Just moments ago, he was occupied inside Inferno's Cage by Lucas. Instant teleportation? Was that even possible?

No... no no... no... that wasn't possible.

I jumped off of Torch as soon as I got close enough and rushed towards Arthur and Princess Tessia. Arthur was in bad shape. Most of his clothes were disintegrated, with only patches of his uniform intact and a strange bandage around his left arm. He was bloody all over and I could see deep gashes near his sides where a rib bone was visible. His body was wrapped around the Princess and from what I can tell; he used most of his mana to protect her. Thanks to that, she was almost unscathed.

The rest of the students all rushed out of the viewing platform and made their way here. Fortunately, the Princess was okay but Arthur needed immediate attention. As soon as I got close enough to try and help them, though, Arthur's little bond stopped me in my tracks.

"Grrr..." Normally, I'd find the cute white fox that rides on top of Arthur's head to be cute but right now, the killing intent it was giving off was anything but cute. The amount of pure menace radiating from that little fox was no joke. It seemed to be protecting its master and Princess Tessia.

"It's okay little buddy, I'm only trying to help." I try to slowly ease my way closer but its growl only gets louder. Torch, who was normally unafraid even in chaos of battle, was holding me back with her beak clutching the back of my shirt.

"P-Professor, I-I didn't mean to. I mean, I didn't think Princess Tessia would suddenly faint." Curtis runs to me, his face pale in fright.

"It's alright, I know. I don't know how, but Arthur managed to protect the Princess. His bond won't let me get close to them though." I clench my fists in frustration. Arthur needed immediate attention. Why was his bond risking his master's life by doing this? What was it trying to protect? Curtis' attempts at trying to get Arthur and Tessia failed as well, so we all just stood around the two of them.

Every attempt at getting even a step closer to Arthur and Tessia resulted in the bond lashing out at us. "Someone get Director Goodsky!" I barked out. Some of the students regained their senses but when they were about to leave, a loud screech filled the air.

From above, a green owl soared down and landed in front of Arthur's bond.

"Kyu!"

"Hoo~"

"Kyu kyu~"

“Hoot!”

“A-are they communicating?” Prince Glayder couldn’t help but stammer out in confusion.

“I-I think so?” I scratched my head at this. Can mana beasts of different species communicate?

As we all stood there, watching a white fox and a green owl ‘talk’ to each other, a couple of minutes later, Director Goodsky arrived looking quite flustered.

“Oh my.” She kneeled in front of the two of them but this time, Arthur’s bond didn’t do anything to stop her.

“Director Goodsky...” Before I have the chance to tell her what happened, she stops me.

“Please. I’ll hear what happened later. Taking these two to the infirmary is top priority. I will take the two of them myself. Go contact Guild Hall and have them send over their top healers.” She said while levitating Arthur and the Princess.

I give her a nod before getting on top of Torch.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

“COUGH! COUGH! Aughh...”

I’m woken up by a jolt of searing pain throughout my side, causing me to have a fit of coughs. My whole body is in a concoction of different kinds of pain. From the stabbing pain to the burning pain to the throbbing pain with the occasional tearing pain radiating over my entire body.

Without the strength to even scream, I’m left gritting my teeth as I clench the side of the bed I was lying on.

They really needed to hurry up and invent anesthesia.

A few minutes later as I got a little more used to the agony that my body was in; I feebly turn my head to see Sylvia sleeping next to me.

“How are you feeling Arthur?” Director Goodsky’s familiar voice comes from the other side of the bed.

Without the strength to turn my head again, I whimper. “Never better. Why do you ask?”

“Kuku~ if you have the will to answer sarcastically, I’m sure you’ll be okay.”

If I had the strength to roll my eyes at her, I would.

“How’s Tessia?” I ask, my voice hoarse.

“Well, good news is, Tessia is in a much better state than you.” She sighed.

“...Her body can’t handle her beast will, right?”

“H-how did you know?” Director Goodsky comes around so she’s facing me.

“Because I was the one that gave the beast will to her.” I try to sit up but the pain from my body makes me stop almost immediately.

Continuing what I was saying, I grit my teeth to bear the pain. “Make sure no one knows that Tessia has a beast will, at least for now. I’d help Tessia with the assimilation myself if I was able to but I’ll leave her to you.” I can tell she wanted to ask more questions but she held back for my sake.

“Once I got you both back into infirmary, I didn’t let anyone else see either of besides the healers. I contacted the royal family, as well as your own though. They should be coming soon. I assumed that she acquired the beast will from Virion but to think it was from you. Get some rest, Arthur. Your body is unusually strong though, so I don’t think there will be any repercussions but it’s better to be safe than sorry.” She heads to the door but turns back before leaving. “Thank you for saving Tessia.”

I give her a weak smile as I slump back to sleep.



I stir awake from Sylv licking me on my cheek. ‘Papa, are you feeling better now?’ I must’ve been having a nightmare because I’m drenched in sweat.

“Honey! Art is awake!” I hear my mother’s voice to my left.

Turning my head is a lot easier now if I ignore the pain.

“Hey Mom, when’d you guys get here?” I give her the best smile I could muster up.

“Are you okay? Director Goodsky didn’t really tell us happened yet. How did you get hurt so badly on the first day of school!” I could tell she wanted to hug me but she held herself back after realizing I probably wasn’t in the best state for that.

My sister rushes to the other side of the bed and leans forward. “Brother!! Are you okay now? Does it hurt?” My eyes widen in horror as I see that she was about to place her hand on my body to probe me but before she’s able to, Mother stops her.

“You’re already getting into fights, son?” My father smirks.

“You should see how the other guy looks like.” I grin back making him laugh.

My mother just gasps at this and starts actually imagining what the other person must look like.

“He’s only joking Mrs. Leywin.” Coming in through the door was Director Goodsky with the whole Eralith family, including Tessia, who was looking a lot better.

“T-this...” My father takes a step back in surprise as my mother gasps with her mouth covered.

“Pleased to finally make your acquaintance Mr. and Mrs. Leywin.” Alduin Eralith, Tessia’s father and the former king of Elenoir grabbed my stunned father’s hand and shook it.

“We have always wanted to meet the parents of Arthur. It is such a pleasure to finally get to meet you in person.” The former queen of Elenoir and Tessia’s mother, Merial Eralith hugs my mother, who still had her hands over her mouth in disbelief.

Merial, then, goes to Ellie and pats her head gently. “You must be Arthur’s little sister. You’re so adorable!”

“I-I saw you guys at the announcement a couple of months back...” My father’s speaking skills seems to drastically decline in front of them, which I find surprising

since they didn't react this much even towards the king and queen of Sapin.

"Greetings. I go by Virion Eralith and I am your son's former teacher." He shoots me a cheeky grin as he grasps my father's hand.

Without the energy to even retort, I just smile helplessly back as my father and mother's gaze switches back and forth between the Eralith family and me.

"H-h-h-hello! My name is Tessia Eralith. It's a pleasure to m-meet you! Please take care of me! I'm Arthur's childhood f-f-friend and I'm not sure if he talked about me with you but I really am!" Tessia bows so her body is at a full ninety-degree angle as her voice is a mixture of respect and panic. She quickly gets back up with her hair draping over most of her face and as she tries to fix her hair, I can see her face becoming more and more red.

At this, my parents become a bit more surprised, but my mother looks at me with a coy smile that says she's onto something and kneels in front of Tessia.

"I see. Well aren't you the prettiest girl I've ever seen. Please take good care of my son. As you may know, he's the type to get into trouble a lot, so it'll really help me if I know he has someone like you next to him, now and in the future." My mother shoots her a wink as she strokes Tessia's hair.

I'm not really sure how what Tess really heard but she was definitely overthinking everything. Eyes widening as her face that was already red turned a shade brighter, she responds in a voice that was an octave higher than usual. "Y-YESS!!!" She beamed while nodding vigorously.

My father was still clueless as to what was going on but I could only internally groan. Leave it to my mother to instill misleading thoughts like this to a 13-year-old girl.

After getting back up, both my mother and Tessia's mother broke out into a fit of giggles while my sister began pouting because our mother said Tessia was the prettiest girl she's seen.

"How are you feeling, brat?" Virion takes a seat on the edge of the bed I was laying as he gave a pat to Sylvie who went back to sleep. Tessia, regaining her senses, walks up to me too with a worried expression.

"Heh... I can beat you in a fight right now, Gramps." I try to hold in the coughs that were

about to come out but I couldn't.

"I'm so sorry, Art. If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't have been..." I stop her mid-sentence and poke her gently between her eyebrows with my finger.

"Don't furrow your brows, Tess. Your face will turn ugly." As the strength in my arm gives out, I slump back down and take a deep breath.

"Gramps, did you take a look at Tess' mana core? How's everything looking?" I couldn't help but be worried since I knew exactly what she was going through.

He gives me a soft smile. "Luckily, her body seems to be a lot more compatible with the beast core than your body was when you first integrated. By the way... How the hell did you manage to pick up an Elderwood Guardian's beast core?" He leaned in forward and spoke in a hushed voice. Gramps knew there some things that I didn't want my family to know about so he made it so that only we could hear, just in case.

"By killing one, of course." I give him weak smirk.

"You're joking... no... you're joking, right? You're telling me that you killed an S class mana beast?" Grampa's usually stern face was round in astonishment as he gets even closer, our face almost touching.

"You're too close gramps. I can smell what you had for you last meal... wait. How long have I been out for?" I couldn't get a grasp on how much time has passed.

"From what Cynthia told me, it's been a bit more than a day since you passed out. You missed your second day of class." He lets out a sigh.

"Oh no... I guess I can forget about shooting for perfect attendance..." I give him a weak elbow to his arm, making him chuckle.

"Hehe" Tessia giggles as well as she takes a seat on the bed too.

"I'm telling you! I'm Arthur Leywin's best friend! We're like brothers! If I can't visit him, then who could? I'm telling you it's true!!" I hear a familiar voice echo in the distance and I couldn't help but chortle at my friend.

Director Goodsky, hearing this as well, signals to the security to let him through.

“ARTHUR! You okay man?” He rushes towards me totally oblivious to the other people in the room.

“You’re late. And you didn’t even bring any food with you?” Letting out an exaggerated sigh, I just slightly shake my head.

“Haaa... I guess you’re fine if you can talk like that.” Elijah lets out a sigh as relief washes over his face.

I start smiling as his head comes back up and recognizes whom the other people in the room were. My friends face contorted from relief to terror as he realizes that, besides my family, the Director of the Academy and the whole Royal Family of the kingdom of Elenoir were also in the room.

“Uhh... oh my...” His slack jaw fails to form words.

“Pfft, Hahaha... oww... haha” My stomach felt like it was being wrangled as I couldn’t stop laughing.

“Gramps, Mr. and Mrs. Eralith, I’d like you to meet my closest friend, Elijah.”

“P-leased to meet you! Sorry for being so rude just now!” Elijah immediately bows, almost dropping his glasses.

After everyone got acquainted with each other, my parents continued to get acquainted with Tessia’s parents in the other side of the room. Gramps finally left me alone and started catching up with Director Goodsky after wringing me of all the details and telling me to make time for him once I’m better to further discuss everything else.

“Brother. Who’s prettier, me or her?” Ellie points at Tess and gives me a serious look.

“You guys are both pretty ugly to me.” I just shrug helplessly but I regretted it as soon as the words left my mouth.

“OWW! That seriously hurts right now!” I groan as the both of them pinch and twist the skin on my arm.

“Tess, like I said, Elijah is a close friend of mine. You guys should get along.” I say through gritted teeth, my arm still throbbing, more so from the state of my body than

the power of my sister and Tess' pinches.

"Sorry I never formally introduced myself to you, I'm Tessia Eralith, Arthur's CLOSEST friend." She sticks out her hand and as Elijah accepts her handshake, he responds, "I'm Elijah, Arthur's BEST friend. Nice to meet you." Sparks flew between them as they glared at each other in competition.

I just rolled my eyes as my sister giggled. I was getting tired from being awake for even this long, my eyelids beginning to weigh down heavily.

Director Goodsky, noticing this, announces to everyone. "Now! I think we should give Arthur some more time to rest. His life isn't in danger but he should be very tired right now."

"Son, come visit home after you're all healed up, okay?" My father grasps my hand and gives it a gentle squeeze before herding my family out.

"Get plenty of rest. Okay, dear?" My mother says as she's heading out. Tessia's parents say their brief goodbyes while patting me softly on my arm before following out after my parents.

"We'll catch up soon brat." Virion ruffles my hair, making me wince and tows Tessia and Elijah out with him.

"Haa..." I look at Sylvie who's still fast asleep.

As I was about to close my eye, the door squeaks opens once more.

"Did you leave something, Tess?" Spotting from the corner of my eyes, I don't bother turning my head.

"Hey Arthur..." She arrives next to me glances back at the door.

"Hmm?"

"You said you couldn't really move your body, right?" I can see with my peripheral view that she's fidgeting a little.

"I can probably only turn my head and lift my arm for a little bit, why?" As I turn my head towards her, my eyes widen in surprise as I realize that Tess' face was just

centimeters away from mine. Her eyes gaze at me with an expression I've never seen in her ever and before long, I feel her lips as her eyes close.

The soft, warm sensation of her lips on top of mine catches me by surprise but my body doesn't let me react. Instead, I spot a small mole in the outer corner of her left eye that I've never noticed before.

A small, glistening strand of saliva connects my lips to hers as she pulls away, her eyes never avoiding mine. She quickly turns her head and runs out of the room leaving me more dazed than when I first woke up.

Chapter 57

Feelings and Old Memories

TESSIA ERALITH'S POV:

I kissed him... I k-kissed him!

As I ran out of the room, I could feel the temperature in my face rising rapidly. That was my first k-kiss! I wonder if he liked it? Did I do it right? My face didn't look weird as I kissed him r-right?

I stop in the hall and look at my reflection in the window. I stand right in front of it and pretend to kiss Art again to see how I looked.

"EEK! NOOO!!" Banging my head on the window in embarrassment, I could only groan at the thought of how weird I must've looked to him. As I look outside through the window with my forehead still glued against it, I touch my lips with my fingers.

His lips sure were soft. They were a bit chapped since he was so hurt but it felt nice.

"Hehe..."

I notice that my face in the reflection showed a perverted grin on it.

Oh God, I'm turning into a pervert. I wonder if I came on too strong? What if he didn't like it? What if he thinks I'm some sort of pervert now?

"UGHHH" I slump down to my knees as my forehead slides down the window.

Wait. How am I supposed to face him now? Things were just getting better too! Did I just ruin everything? What if he ignores me now, when he sees me?

A throbbing ache thumped in my chest as tears start welling up in the corner of my eyes. I wouldn't be able to bear it if Art ignored me like that.

Should I go back to his room and pretend it was all a joke? I imagine myself bursting

in the room laughing and pointing at him. “Got you! Hahaha! You really fell for it!”

Am I stupid? I groan again at the stupidity of it all.

No! You did the right thing, Tess! Things would never progress if I left it up to Art’s pace! He still thinks of me as a child every time we’re together. It was for the best!

“Yeah!” I fist pump the air to encourage myself but I still let out a big sigh at the thought of him not liking me.

“Tch!” Who cares! If that stupid Art chooses to ignore me, I can just find someone better than him! He wasn’t that great anyway! He’s just a teeny bit better looking than average. He’s only slightly better than mediocre in magic, right?

Sigh. Who am I kidding? I couldn’t imagine myself with anyone else but Arthur. Sure, over the years, there were nobles that tried to impress me and tried to get close but they weren’t like Arthur.

That stupid Art! He’s such a player! “Don’t furrow your brows, Tess. Your face will turn ugly.” I say in a mocking tone while imitating him.

Tch! Making my heart skip a beat for no reason! That stupid player!

“GAH! Who cares if he doesn’t like you, Tess! It’s his loss! What don’t you have? I’m a talented mage! I’m also pretty smart and I’m popular too, right? I don’t want to sound conceited but I have a bit of confidence in my looks, right? Arthur is the one that’s missing out if he doesn’t snatch you up!” I point at my reflection as if she’s a different person.

I wonder what kind of excuses I should make to talk to Arthur. There were plenty of excuses! His Mother personally asked me to watch over him, yeah! A-and also the beast core assimilation! I could just ask him to help me with it since he’s the one that gave me the beast core! It’s only right that he takes the responsibility right?

Sigh...

I take one last look back at where Arthur’s room was before I slump back to my dorm.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

I k-kissed Tess...

I kissed Tessia Eralith, a thirteen-year-old girl. Isn't this a crime? Am I a criminal? No, calm down. I'm in the body of a twelve-year-old boy. Why do I feel so guilty then? I shouldn't, right?

She's the one that kissed me after all! I'm the victim here! Making a move on me while I'm in this vulnerable state. She sure was smart, that Tess. As I stared blankly at the door that she left through, my shaking hand finally reached my lips and I just lay there, dumbfounded, touching my mouth as my mind can't help but recall the soft, moist touch of her lips.

This is wrong. Yes, I'm technically only twelve years old, but with the mental age from my previous life and this life combined, I was almost 50! Even assuming that I had kids late, Tess would still be around the age of a daughter if I had one.

Goddammit! All of this is because of this accursed body! These raging hormones in my body right now! The reason I'm feeling so guilty is because I actually enjoyed it. It felt nice when Tess kissed me. It shouldn't feel nice and I shouldn't enjoy a kiss from a little girl, but I did.

I groan, half from pain and the other half from thinking what was going to happen between Tess and I. Knowing her, she was probably overthinking a lot of things right now and she's going to be really uncomfortable around me.

I almost laugh at the thought of what people might think of Tess when she's with me. If someone didn't know any better, they might even assume that she hated me since she's the type to act cold when she doesn't know what to do.

Something tells me that if I don't clear things up with her, there will only be more misunderstandings.

How should I clear things up though? It's not like she confessed or anything. Should we date? No, no, no. Did kids our age even know what dating was?

I look back and think of the time when I was twelve in my past life. When I was twelve, my life was filled with only training. Being raised in an orphanage and getting sent to an institute solely dedicated to raising duelists, I can't say that I really have any

experience in dating.

We were too young anyhow, right? I'm technically only twelve in this body! Is this body even capable of reproducing yet? Oh God, now you're overthinking this, Arthur.

Haa... it's not like I hate Tess. I'm actually quite fond of her. She is still immature in some senses, but I shouldn't let that be an excuse right?

"What do you think, Sylv?" I poke my sleeping bond as her body slowly heaves up and down with her breaths. I'm surprised she didn't wake up when Tess kissed me.

As I play with my bond's ears and paws, my breaths begin to synchronize with hers and I soon fall asleep.



Over the past couple of days, quite a few people came to visit me while my body was recovering. Curtis came by and asked if I was okay. I only shot him a grin and said that his move was pretty damn strong, making him laugh. Claire Bladeheart came by to make sure I was okay. She also kept me up to date on the Disciplinary Committee meetings so I wouldn't be totally lost when I went back.

I was surprised Kathyln came by herself instead of with her brother. She asked if I was okay and I swear, she had a worried expression on her face. I was more surprised by that than anything else. I could tell everyone had a lot of questions. Curtis looked like he wanted to ask me something a few times but he held back because of my condition. When Professor Glory came by to visit, she brought me some fruits.

"I'll tell you now, Lucas has been pretty heated up in class. I can't blame him, though. To him, it must've felt like he was beating you in every sense, but you suddenly disappeared from his spells and appeared a few hundred meters away instantly." She paused before continuing.

"H-how did you do it anyways? I've never seen anything like that. You should know that even Director Goodsky isn't capable of what you just did. Instant teleportation was always thought of to be a myth. Yet, here you are, a twelve-year-old."

By this time, I was able to sit up without it hurting that much so I lifted myself up just enough to be eye-level to the seated Professor Glory.

“Growth isn’t stopped by a lack of talent or a series of unfortunate luck. Growth is stopped once the person limits his own ability to grow. With that said, I believe everyone has a secret or two they wish to keep to themselves.” I sink back down in my bed, leaving Professor Glory confused and without a means to respond.

Director Goodsky visited once. I asked what was happening to the class I was supposed to be teaching and they said that, for now, Professor Glory volunteered to take on the extra class as a substitute until I’m better. She didn’t stay for long and came mainly to update me on how Tess was doing.

“As her assimilation continues, she’s becoming more and more stable. These past couple of days, she has only had one more fit.” She states.

“Thanks for taking care of her, Director.” I give her a smile.

“Don’t thank me, Arthur. She is my precious disciple after all. Ahh, that reminds me. I will be out of the academy for a couple days for some business. Since Virion has gone back, I need you to help Tessia with her assimilation until I am back. Can you do that for me?” She says before leaving through the door.

“Uh, yeah. S-sure, I can do that.” I shake my head helplessly at this. I’m not sure if Director Goodsky really has errands to run but she was definitely giving me an excuse to meet Tess.

My body’s recovering rate was a lot faster thanks to the assimilation of Sylvia’s Dragon Will into my muscles and bones. I also spent this time while recovering to also meditate and develop my mana core. I was at the threshold of breaking out of the dark yellow stage but it would take a bit more time until I could reach solid yellow. I would still feel a bit weak, but I planned on leaving the infirmary room and resuming normal school life starting tomorrow. My body felt stiff from being in bed for so long.

Knocks

“Come in.” I turn my head as Sylvie hops off the bed and goes towards the door.

“I came to visit you!” My father has a wide grin on his face as soon as he notices how much better I look than before.

“Hey, Dad.” I smile back as Sylvie ‘kyus’ in greeting before hopping back up next to me.

Taking a seat, my father catches me up on everything going on at home. We talked for quite a bit of time and I realized how comfortable it was to talk to my father. Family sure was different than anyone else. The fact that he didn't have any ulterior motives, no plan, no secrets, was comforting. He just wanted what was best for me.

After a brief period of silence, I ask him something that's been bothering me. "Hey Dad. How come Mom never really uses her magic? I mean, she healed small wounds for me when I was little and stuff, but that was about it. I remember you telling me how great of an Emitter she was."

Looking at my father, I'm surprised that his usual bright face turns a little sullen.

"Your mother, she carries a lot of weight in her heart." Letting out a deep sigh, he continues.

"I know you're mature enough to know this but I want you to be patient. She'll tell you when she feels ready so I want you to wait for her to tell you directly." He scruffs my hair as we change the topic.

"How's everyone doing at home anyway?" It hasn't been that long but it still feels like it's been a while since I've spent some time with my family.

"Oh, you know, your mother is busy mingling with her friends. Your sister, though, she's becoming quite a handful." He chuckles to himself.

"Maybe we had it too easy raising you, but I sometimes just don't know what to do with Ellie." Scratching his head, I notice some wrinkles that he hasn't had before.

"Just give her some space. She'll come around." Patting my father's arm weakly, I reposition myself as I feel my body cramping up.

"I should let you rest, Son." He pinches my nose softly and quietly leaves through the door, leaving me wondering what could possibly have happened with Mother that she became too traumatized to use her powers.

"Kyu?" Sylvie asks me what I'm thinking of and I just shake my head. "It's nothing, Sylv. I hope."

Chapter 58

First Day At The Job

“Easy... take it slow. There you go.” Elijah supported me back up. It’s been exactly one week since I’ve gotten injured and also the last time since I’ve walked. Even with mana circulating throughout my body, strengthening my limbs, I still felt weak.

“Kyu...” Sylvie looked at me with as close of a concerned face she could have for a foxlike mana beast. She was walking besides me instead of curling up on top of my head, afraid that I won’t be able to hold her up.

Elijah came over to my hospital room as soon as first period was over. I would be starting off my day as a Professor in the Practical Mana Manipulation class and I wasn’t so eager in my current state. With my legs giving out every couple of steps and my back and sides burning, I barely had the strength to get to class, let alone teach it.

After slowly getting used to walking, I stopped leaning towards Elijah for support and used Dawn’s Ballad as my walking stick. I couldn’t help but chuckle because of the ill-humored irony. I remember how I thought that this sword was nothing more than a walking stick instead of priceless sword. I shake my head at the fact that my assumption back then was actually foreshadowing my current situation.

Elijah wrapped the handle and sheathe in a white bandage both for comfort and for safety from suspicious eyes. Here I was, a twelve-year-old, already using a cane to support myself from falling.

“Are you going to be okay by yourself? Maybe I should at least help you out in between classes for today?” Elijah had a concerned look on his face as he stuck close by me, ready to catch me if I stumble.

“I’ll be okay.” I don’t have the confidence to say that I won’t fall, but I didn’t want to make Elijah constantly be by my side.

As we arrived in front of the classroom, Elijah still had his brows furrowed underneath his glasses and I knew he was hesitant to let me go by myself.

“Arthur. Let me help you.”

I turn my head around to see Princess Kathyln run toward me, away from her group of friends. Without giving me a chance to respond, she places her arm around my waist as her other wraps around the hand that I wasn't holding my walking sti... sword with.

“Uhh... okay. Thank you.” I shrug at Elijah, whose body was frozen, and carefully make my way inside my room.

“I heard our new Professor was finally coming today!”

“Oh really? I liked Professor Glory though.”

“Anyone should be better than Professor Geist, right?”

“You never know, we might get an even more dangerous weirdo this time.”

“Hey, isn't that the Disciplinary Committee officer that beat Geist?”

“He looks hurt...”

The various discussions that the students were having all changed to murmurs about me as soon as I walked in.

“I'll be fine now, Princess Kathyln. Thank you.” I ease my arm out of her soft hold.

“You need help up the stairs...” Her expressionless face didn't match the concern in her voice. I just shake my head and motion her to go on first.

Sylvie followed close behind as I walked to the middle of the room as she took small hops towards the moveable podium that was placed in the center of the small stadium.

“Whew...” I let out a deep breath in relief as I put all of my weight on the podium that was a little too high for me.

I look up to see Feyrith in one of the desks with a curious expression on his face. As soon as Kathyln reached her desk, I spotted her looking back, trying to find me. She also gave me a confused look when she realized that I never went up the stairs behind her and instead came to the middle of the room.

By this time, the conversations amongst the classmates that centered around me diminished as more and more of the young mages began wondering what I was doing leaning against the professor's podium.

“I'm not sure how many of you know my name, but I believe that most know at least

who I am. My name is Arthur Leywin, a Disciplinary Committee member, the only son of two wonderful mages, a doting brother, and your new professor. Let's get along."

I counted down in my head in prediction of when the class would erupt. Almost exactly in sync, the noble brats that filled the classroom stood up in disbelief and some in anger as they shouted to stop kidding around and get back up to my seat.

"You expect us to believe that a brat like you is our new professor?" One of the second years that is either retaking this class or is taking this class for the first time exclaimed.

"Stop fucking around and get back up here! Who do you think you are?!" One short first year barked.

Wow... such vulgar language coming out from a twelve-year-old.

"Sigh..." If I could teach this class while lying down, I'd honestly do it at this point. I'm too tired and hurt for this.

This would be a lot easier if Professor Glory or Director Goodsky let the class know that I would be teaching beforehand. She should have at least given me an official document to prove that I was the Professor. I wonder if Director Goodsky did this on purpose.

This seems like something she would do.

"Mmm... would you guys believe me if I said that Director Goodsky appointed me to be the professor for this class for the remainder of the semester?"

"Get real!"

"Stop joking!"

"Shut up!"

Another round of protests resounded within the room as the students were growing rowdier.

Looking at Feyrith and Kathyln, I see Feyrith's handsome face filled with a mixture of incredulity and doubt, while Kathyln's face was also that of slight shock.

"Don't get so cocky just because you beat the old professor! Do you think you could've won if Princess Kathyln and Feyrith didn't tire him out?" A different second year

jumped down and landed on the stage with a loud thud.

He had a pretty big build, and judging from the poor circulation of mana in his body, he's probably at the level of being able to augment only some of his body.

He took big strides towards me, preparing to carry me off the stage if he had to. Feyrith was preparing to jump off the stage as well to stop the big guy but I just shook my head at him.

"You shaking your head at me now? Who do you think you are?" I guess this buffoon thought that my head gesture was directed mockingly at him.

Half of the students were a bit nervous, not wanting to get caught up in another drama during class, while the other half was cheering Mr. Brute here, on.

"Sit."

THUD

The entire room vibrated slightly as I directly bombarded him with mana, making him fall back on his butt.

"..."

Hobbling over to the student that was sitting down confused and stunned on his ass, I felt like an old master of some sort, teaching a rebellious young disciple the true way.

"Don't ask me why, but Director Goodsky didn't bother giving me any special documents proving that I am your new professor. Taking a quick glance at all of you, though, with the few exceptions, I can't see how any of you can even call yourself mages yet."

I deliberately step over the still shaken Mr. Brute and make my way to the other side of the silent room.

"Do you think that, because you've formed your mana core, you can call yourself a mage? I can tell you right now that this cute little fox here, yeah, she can take on any of you." I pick up Sylvie below her armpits and show the entire class.

"Any of you students that feel like they need proof or don't even want to bother

attending this class, go find Director Goodsky or lie down and make angels in the grass outside. For those of you who are even a tiny bit curious as to what I've got to teach all of you, feel free to stay." I wait a couple of seconds, but whether it was because of my little trick with Mr. Brute or because they were too lazy, none of the students left.

"Now... If you'll please go back to your seat, student, I'll begin my lesson." I gaze down at the second year that jumped down, eager to show off his limited ability.

"Uhh..." Quickly getting up, he made his way back to his seat, a look of embarrassment etched onto his face.

I walk back to the center of the stage as I lean on the podium that Sylvie was curled up on.

"Since this is a Practical Mana Manipulation class, I'll ask a practical question. What is the best way to utilize mana in the surrounding atmosphere?" I look around and almost instantly, a nerdy-looking girl with ponytails shoots her hand up.

"Mana is best utilized by absorbing the mana naturally formed in the atmosphere into the mana core where it can be condensed and purified for use when spells or techniques are cast." She gives me a satisfied look, as if she was proud of her own answer.

"Good. Now. As you all know, the difference between Augmenters and Conjurers lie in the fact that Augmenters use mostly the mana in their cores via their mana channels while Conjurers directly absorb mana from the surrounding atmosphere via their mana veins. So... Why do both types of mages have to meditate and absorb mana if only the Augmenters actually utilize the mana that they absorb into their core?" I quiz, not looking at anyone in particular.

"..." The nerdy girl's confident hand shrinks down as she thinks about what it.

"While Augmenter's incorporate mana into physical attacks, thus reducing the amount of mana used, Conjurers manipulate the space that the spell is casted in directly, consuming more mana. Because of that, Conjurers use the purified mana in their mana core as a reserve to avoid backlash." Kathyln answers, her face unchanging as she remains seated.

"Correct! Then the last question of the day... Is the color of a Conjurer's or even the Augmenter's mana core a truly accurate way of measuring the level of the mage's

power?" I lean forward, shifting my weight from my left leg to my right.

"..." I hold in my chuckle as Kathlyn's usually composed and vacant face scrunches in deep thought. "That'll be your homework for today! Everyone come down to the stage and line up! I want the Conjurers to my left and Augmenters to my right!"

After a few grumbles of complaints, eventually, everyone makes their way to one side of the stadium, all lined up side by side faced towards me.

"For this exercise, I want everyone to initiate the most basic spell of your affinity. Conjurers, no wand." I state.

For Augmenters, the most basic spells that they're taught all come in a very similar form. For fire affinity Augmenters, it would be Fire Fist, which was igniting a small ember covering their fist. For wind, it would be Whirlwind Fist. For water, it would be Aqua Fist, and for earth, Boulder Fist. After mages are able to manifest their elements, the Augmenters' first step is learning to integrate their element into their hands, which are the limbs that they're most accustomed to using.

The fact that these royal mages are even here is because, thanks to their lineage, they have high talent and usually have the ability to manifest their elements early on. It took my father more than twenty years in order for him to manifest an actual flame, but these 12-14 year olds can already do that. THAT was the difference in genes, something that even I found to be undeniable.

As for the Conjurers, the most basic spell involves gathering a specific elemental mana into a sphere and shooting it. For Fire specialists, that would be in the form of the spell, fireball. For wind, it would be wind bullet. For water, that would be water bullet and for earth, a stone bullet.

Conjurers had it easier since they didn't have to directly form the element in their bodies, but just absorb the specific mana particles around them and use that to invoke the spell. Why Conjurers had specializations in different elements had to do with how well they were able to sense the specific elemental mana particles around them and utilize it.

I rest my head on my right hand as I watch both types of mages prepare for their spell.

The Augmenters in the class all begin concentrating with their dominant hand clenched into a fist. A few long seconds later, their spell became visible as the element

they had their affinity in surrounded their fist. The time it took for the Augmenters varied but not by much.

The Conjurers in class all began softly chanting as the space in front of their palms began glowing different colors, depending on what element their spell was. Unsurprisingly, the time it took Feyrith and Kathyln to form the spell in front of his or her hand was much faster than everyone else's.

The only difference between the Augmenters and Conjurers in their spell was that the element surrounded the Augmenter's fist while the element was formed in front of the Conjurer's palm.

"Now. Augmenters, I want you to try and shoot your spell in front of you, while Conjurers, I want you guys to try and absorb the spell you conjured into your hand." I give them an innocent smile as they stare at me blankly.

"..." They realized that I wasn't joking when I motioned for them to do it.

"HURGGH!" "HAH!" "Grrr..." "Urghhh" "Shoot!" "Fire!"

It was almost comical watching the Augmenters try and separate the element from their fists.

"Ouch!" "AHH!" "Kyaa!" "OUCH!" "FUCK!" "OWW!" "DAMMIT"

The Conjurers weren't any better as all of them ended up getting cut, burned, wet or bruised. After about 15 minutes of struggling, most gave up and looked at me accusingly. Even Feyrith and Kathyln looked at me doubtfully.

"This is stupid. We all know that only high level Augmenters can cast long distance spells!" One of the Augmenter students cried.

"Yeah! And what's the point in absorbing back a spell we prepared and conjured anyway?" The nerdy girl whined.

Leaving Sylvie on top of the podium, I hobble to the opposite side of the stage, away from the students.

Taking a brief moment to concentrate, I aim at the space between where the Augmenters were lined up and the Conjurers were lined up.

“Wind bullet.”

A stream of air shot out of my palm and bent the wall surrounding the stage into a small crater.

“ ... ”

After getting over the initial surprise, one of the students just retorted. “Big deal... It’s strong but most can do that once they’ve reached the orange stage.”

“True. Since it seems like no one figured out why what I did was special, let me explain.” I raise my other arm and will a gust to form around my hand. I shoot the newly invoked wind bullet, but this time, as the wind bullet goes across the room, by the time it reaches the wall, only a soft ‘fwoosh’ sound is heard.

“THAT’S what most are able to do once they’ve reached the orange stage.” I give a slight wink, leaving them confused.

“I can’t accurately demonstrate what would happen when Conjurers are able to absorb the spells that they invoked, but trust me, it’ll only help you.”

I stagger back to the podium and grab Sylvie. “That’s it for today. Try and come up with the answer to the question and practice what I just told you to do. See you tomorrow.”

They won’t be able to produce results on that level anytime soon. I wasn’t aiming for that anyways. My hope is that, through this, both types of mages alike will be able to at least overcome one of their major weaknesses right now, while their bodies are still undeveloped and malleable.

Chapter 59

Confrontation

I take a deep breath as I sit on a nearby bench outside. Realizing that I ended class a bit too early I noticed the campus was fairly peaceful with most students still in their classrooms. It's been a while since I've felt this weak, but getting up and walking around definitely helped.

I sat idly, watching Sylvie chase after a butterfly through the grass lawn in front of me when I hear footsteps approaching my direction from the right.

"Is this seat taken?" I turn my head to see Princess Kathyln lean forward so her face was level with mine.

"No, go ahead." I say as I slowly scootch a bit to my left to make room for her. As she carefully placed her handkerchief over the bench, she took a seat on top of it, straightening out her rumpled skirt. We sat there, silently, as both of us just watched Sylvie finally capturing the agile butterfly that was now struggling in her paws.

"I heard what happened from my brother... I'm sorry." Her voice grew quiet at the end of her sentence.

I keep my eyes focused on Sylvie but I respond with a soft chuckle. "Haha, why are you saying sorry as well? Even if it was your brother's fault, which it isn't, he already apologized."

"It's just... I feel like my family owes you many apologies. For what happened with Sebastian and my Father as well. That time at the Auction house... he's not usually like that but he was shocked as well at the turn of events and he needed to keep his image and..." For the first time, I witnessed Kathyln getting flustered as her usual composed face becomes flushed and her expression panicked as she tried to make me understand.

"Pfft! I think this is the first time I've seen an actual difference in your expression, Princess. It's a nice change." I snicker, as she blushes even brighter, covering her face and turning her body away from me.

“...Please, don’t mock me, Arthur. I didn’t expect you to be this type of person.” She said with her hands still covering her face.

“Oh? What kind of person did you expect me to be?” I tilt my head in curiosity.

“W-well, when I first met you at the Auction event, I noticed you held yourself with much maturity...” She murmured while her back was still facing me.

“You notice how people hold themselves when you were barely 8 years old?” Reading the posture of a person is something keen adults barely learn how to do later on with years of meeting many different kinds of people.

“Yes... being the only Princess of a kingdom, you end up acquiring that skill fairly quickly. Also, with both my father and brother being quite the character, I felt like my mother and I were the only normal ones at times.” By this time, Princess Kathryn turned back towards me after composing herself.

“Oh? I didn’t really find anything unusual about your brother. He seemed to be quite charismatic.” I remember meeting Curtis for the first time at the Auction house. Compared to then, he matured quite a bit.

“Yes, he’s gotten a lot better, seeing as he’s able to apologize to you. That would’ve been very hard for him a while back because of his pride.” She let out a sigh as the both of us spectated Sylvie’s little battle with another bug.

“When I first saw you, I noticed right away that you were very different from everyone else. How should I say this? I was very intrigued by you...” Her head lowered a bit as she continued speaking.

“Haha... is that right? I thought the opposite since your face had no reaction or change while being near me the whole time.” I let out a soft laugh in reminiscence, remembering the event that happened four years prior already.

“I apologize. I-I’m not the most proficient at using my facial muscles effectively.” I found it cute as she pushed her cheeks up and down with her fingers in an attempt to forcefully make different expressions.

“Tell me about it. I was beginning to think you were wearing a mask by how stiff your face was.” I feel her gaze on my face when I smile, making me feel a little awkward.

“...I will practice.” Princess Kathryn suddenly nods to herself as I spot her expression

looked slightly more determined than usual.

“Pfft! I’m not sure if this is something you can practice. Just don’t force your emotions down and let your face move the way it wants to according to how you feel. When you feel sad, your face will naturally want to frown. When you’re happy, your face will naturally want to smile. Like this!” I over exaggerate the expressions on my face as I switch from an ugly frown to a bright smile.

Oops. Was I overdoing it?

KATHYLN GLAYDER’S POV:

I couldn’t show any weakness. As the only girl in the royal family besides my Mother, I had a duty to uphold. When males came to visit me, hoping to gain my favor, I wouldn’t show any weakness that they might use against me. That was my fight.

I couldn’t read minds, but it wasn’t hard to see that all of the males that came to me, both my age and ones a lot older, had ulterior motives. Royal lineage, superior ability, and physical appearance... the things that all people believe make their lives easier were shackles that robbed me of the freedom that I wished to have.

Yet, here I was, with a boy my age that is so much more talented and sought after, yet still so... bright. He shined with a brilliance that made me want to be like him. What made him so different from me? How was he still able to express his emotions freely without being afraid of what others will view him as?

I couldn’t control myself from letting out a laugh as Arthur contorted his face like that. He looked so silly.

Giggles I instantly cover my mouth, trying to hide the smile coming out.

“See! That wasn’t so hard!” His exaggerated smile turns gentle, comforting me.

“I should teach stuff like this instead of Mana Manipulation, right?” He lets out a pained laugh as he leans down to pet his bond that was now sitting down between his legs.

“That reminds me. The wind bullet spell that you used to demonstrate seemed almost like a Conjurer’s spell compared to the second one that you used. How exactly did you

do it? I am also curious as to why you made the Conjurers try and absorb the spell back into their bodies. I have never heard of Conjurers doing that.” I went on like an excited child about the questions that filled my mind, making me embarrassed.

“Whoa! Is that why you came up to me? Is this what you were after?” He leans away from me, shocked.

“N-no! Of course not! That was never my intention!” Oh no! I wasn’t like the men that came after me with some motive. I just saw him sitting there and wanted to... why did I ask to sit next to him?

I realized my hand was slightly touching his arm so I pulled it back quickly.

“Heh, I was obviously joking, Princess. I’m not sure if I should tell you though. It wouldn’t be very fair of me to give you the advantage like that, right?” He gives me a little wink that makes my chest feel heavy all of a sudden. What was that?

“I-I guess you are right. It would be unfair to give me answers on the homework that you assigned.” I respond quietly.

“Mmm... well, I guess I can give a little pointer for a fellow Disciplinary Committee member. Watch now.” I look up to see him concentrate as he lifts both his hands, palms faced up.

His left hand began to glow as soft winds swirled, surrounding his hand. As for his right hand, only a small portion in the center of his palm glowed and the wind that gathered towards this hand didn’t surround his arm, but instead, swirled into a sphere just above his palm. With a brief flick of his wrists, he shoots out the small gusts of wind in both hands forward.

The wind that surrounded his left hand dissipated after a few meters but the spherical wind that he conjured with his right hand shot out several times farther before dissipating with a soft “pa”.

“There is your hint for the Augmenter’s homework. As for what I assigned the Conjurers, think backwards.” He gets up as I contemplated about what he just did.

“I should get going now. Let me know if you need more lessons on facial expressions.” He gives me an exaggerated scowl, then a perverted smile, making me almost laugh again.

“Aww... you didn’t laugh this time. Too bad.” He slowly walked off with his bond scampering next to him. I couldn’t help but feel a bit empty as I sat alone on the cramped bench that now seemed too big for just me to sit on.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

“Psst. I heard you got hurt on the first day of class. Are you okay?” Emily’s thick glasses shift down as she leans forward next to me, whispering in the middle of class. We were learning about the basic components that make up different types of artifacts.

“Fwoosh.” All of a sudden, a piece of chalk flew straight at Emily, disappearing somewhere in her curly hair.

Gideon gives a light cough as his hand still stretched out after throwing the chalk at her. “Miss Watsken, please enlighten the class on the various components in a basic light producing artifact.”

“The basic light producing artifact is made up of the basic foundation crystal, Florenite, found abundantly near the outskirts of Sapin and also in the kingdom of Darv. After Florenite is refined, it will constantly let out a dim light so in order to control the output of the ore...”

“Ok ok, that’s enough. Sheesh, I just asked for the material.” Gideon grumbles something under his breath as he cuts Emily mid explanation.

Giving a light shrug, she takes out some paper to write on while she makes futile attempts to scavenge the piece of chalk buried somewhere deep in her hair.

We exchanged notes for a bit, writing to each other about what happened. I tried skimming over the details but that didn’t really seem to work with her.

Eventually, because of the lack of details from my side, she wasn’t really able to piece anything together, leaving her frustrated and curious.

“Something seems off...” She eyed me as we left class after packing up our things. For homework, we were already assigned some sort of mini project where we had to assemble a light-producing artifact or LPA for short.

“You’re overthinking things, Emily. I’m more worried about the project that Gideon already assigned us. I’m so lost after missing the first week.” This was actually true. My critical thinking abilities and vague knowledge of technology from my past allowed me to make connections and understand better than most first years, but everyone was grumbling about how this class was one of their hardest. Leave it to that eccentric Gideon to teach a basic class as if it were several levels higher.

“Meh, I already have a couple LPAs I made lying around in my dorm anyway. Might as well put them to use.” She adjusts her oversized backpack and we head over to grab lunch.

“Wow... you could probably ace this class in your sleep.” I shake my head as I pick up a tray and grab some food.

“Kyu!” ‘Get more meat, Papa!’ Sylvie hops on top of my head in protest when I pick up some vegetables.

“Ok ok.” I go back and pick up a few more pieces of meat when Emily looks at me with a weird expression on her face.

“Can you understand what your bond is saying?” She lifts her glasses up in place as she looks up at Sylvie.

“Can’t all bonds?” I ask.

“No, not at all actually. They can understand their emotions to a certain extent but not... verbal cues.” Her eyes squint as she takes a closer look at Sylv.

Pushing her head back with my finger on her forehead, I respond. “That’s what I meant. I only feel my bond complaining and I just inferred that it was because I picked up vegetables. You’re overthinking things again, Emily.”

“Yeah I guess you’re right. She’s cute though.” She just shrugs and picks up more food for herself.

“Ah! There you are, Art! Director Goodsky wants... Oh, hello.” Elijah stops in his tracks as he realizes that I’m with a friend.

“Hey, Elijah. This is Emily. Emily, Elijah.” I say with my mouth half full with a piece of stewed beef.

“Nice to meet you! Emily smiles and sticks out the hand she wasn’t carrying her food tray with.

“A pleasure to meet you.” Elijah responds as he shakes her hand, a look of curiosity on his face.

“Anyways, Art. You need to... uh... head over to your training room. Director Goodsky, remember?” He gives me a look saying that it’s urgent.

“Oh... wait, now?” I look at my food.

“Yes. Now.” He gently pushes me towards the door while making me scarf down as much food as I can. Sylvie swept a big portion of the meat with her tongue as we placed the tray next to the trash bin.

“You two get acquainted! I’ll be leaving first!” I wave at my friends as they wave back.

I remember Director Goodsky telling me where my private training was while I was in the hospital room. Supposedly, the mana density was supposed to be a lot higher there, making it easier to train.

“I wonder what Director Goodsky wants. I should give her a mouthful about class today.” I say to no one in particular as Sylvie and I make our way towards the room.

All of the rooms were underneath the library where a staff member had to lead you to the rooms. Usually upperclassmen were allowed to borrow a room for a couple of hours to train in but I was lucky to have a private one all to myself.

There were two entrances in the library building; one to the actual library, the other to a sort of waiting room to all of the training facilities. Opening the entrance to the waiting room, I walk slowly past some upperclassmen before arriving at the front desk. “Hi, my name is Arthur Leywin.” I didn’t exactly know what Director Goodsky wanted so I hoped that the lady at the front desk would know what to do once I told her my name.

“Ah yes! Today is your first time visiting the room, correct?” The lady had a very refined suit, reminding me of a concierge at some fancy hotel.

“Yes.” I nod in response as she bends down and opens a drawer.

“Please place both your palms on this stone. Make sure all of the tips of your fingers are flat on it.” She holds out in both hands a flat tablet with various inscriptions etched onto it.

Doing as told, I feel a brief numbing sensation spread over my hands as she activates the tablet.

“Perfect! I’ll show you to your room. Please follow me.” Leading me to a room in the back where a scarred man about two meters tall held a spear guarded the door, the front desk lady ushered me forward.

The room that the scarred man guarded was actually some sort of elevator put together by various gears, which I assumed were powered by either mana cores or some other mana-producing ore.

“Wow. This is my first time riding in something like this.” I say in awe, reminiscing the last time I rode in an elevator.

“Fufu, yes. Not many of these exist yet. A genius artificer that is currently a professor here named Gideon built this device. I’m sure you’ve heard of him?” She says while admiring the elevator herself.

“More than heard of him. He’s actually one of my professors. With the way he teaches his class, I wish he wasn’t such a genius” I give her a wink making her giggle.

“Here we are! Make sure to remember how to get to your room. Since I’ve registered you to your room, you are allowed to come in any time you wish.” She says while guiding me through the halls.

“That scary scarred man won’t stop me?” I ask, pointing up with my sheathed sword.

“Hoho, no. He won’t stop you. Ah! We’ve arrived.” We reached the end of the hall where there was a large double door without any handles.

“This door seems different from all of the other ones.” I turn my head back as I compared.

“Yes. Director Goodsky seems to place quite a bit of precedence in your training.” She gave me a charming smile.

“Yet, she doesn’t even bother to tell my class who their new professor was.” I mutter under my breath.

“Excuse me?” The lady tilts her head in confusion.

“It’s nothing. So how do I open this?” I respond while Sylvie jumps off my head and excitedly hops in place in front of the double doors.

“If you place either of your palms against the door, it will open automatically. If you need any further assistance, there is a communication device inside where you can contact me. If you are hungry, I can also send someone over to bring you some food.” She bows while waiting for me to open the door.

“Thank you. What was your name?” I turn my head, my hand raised, as I was about to open the door.

“Please call me Chloe. I wish you a fruitful training session.” She says, her head still down.

“Got it. Thanks again Chloe.” I turn back and place my right hand on the double doors. With a loud engine-like noise, the area I place my palm glows as streams of light branch out. Eventually, the light dims and the door slides open to reveal a room very different from what I imagined.

I turn my head back but Chloe was already gone. Sylvie runs off before I can even take a step forward and as I look inside the room, the sudden brightness compared to the dim hall makes me squint. My vision soon adjusts and, as I lower my hand, my eyes spot a familiar figure, fidgeting in place as Sylvie scurries up her leg.

I don’t know if it was from the sparkling brightness inside the room or the fact that this room looked more like a huge natural wonder rather than a training facility but my childhood friend looked stunning. Tessia, who was cuddling her cheek against Sylvie on her shoulder, was wearing a very loose, white training robe.

“H-hi.” Tessia says with her head lowered and eyes looking up at me.

I step forward as the door closes behind me. The floor underneath me was a field of grass and there was a rather big pond with a waterfall as well as huge boulders and trees, making me feel as if this was a dream. Snapping out of my momentary daze, I scratch my head with the hand that wasn’t holding Dawn’s Ballad.

“Hey, Tess.” I give her an awkward smile.

“S-should we get started?” Tessia puts Sylvie down on the ground before she shyly starts removing her robe.

“W-wait, what? Get started in what?” I almost trip backwards as I see her bare shoulders.

“The assimilation! Grandpa told me that it works better if you help me through bare skin!” Her face is bright red as I realize she had her breasts covered in some gauze.

Ah right... the assimilation...

Wait, what?

Freaking Gramps, what are you making your granddaughter do!

“Gramps told you that? Y-you don’t need to take off your clothes for the assimilation, stupid! He was messing with you!” I cover my eyes with my hand.

Calm down Arthur. She’s just a 13-year-old. Looking at her like this is a crime!

“S-shut up! How was I supposed to UGH...” Tess falls to her knees before she’s able to lift her robe again.

I run as fast as my injured body would let me as I put Dawn’s Ballad back into my dimension ring. Kneeling down next to her, I place my palm on her warm, pale back. Her robe was down, revealing everything the waist up with the exception of her breast and a portion of her back, which were covered by the gauze. As I feel her body tremble in pain, I couldn’t help but notice how frail her body looked. I guess because I knew how strong of a mage she was; I forgot that she was still just a girl, physically at least.

Taking off the seal on my wrist, I will mana into my childhood friend. Using all four elements, I control the mana to spread throughout her body, counteracting the mana coming from the Elderwood Guardian’s beast will. What Gramps did while I was assimilating was just easing my pain, but by using a balanced mixture of mana from all four elements, I was able to essentially help her body fight against the beast will.

I never tested this but it was based on the same principles I used to help awaken Lilia and my sister.

Her ragged breathing soon calmed down, her trembling gone as she was panting from the relief. As I gently lifted her robe over her frail body, I walked over to the pond and splashed my face with its cold water.

I needed to calm myself down.

After a few moments, I feel my heartbeat slowing down but react again when I hear Tess making her way to me, Sylvie trotting behind her.

Sitting down on her legs next to me, she stares at me, her flushed, tired face still sparkling, as if she wants to say something. After a moment of hesitation she speaks to me in a firm voice.

“Art, can we talk?”

Chapter 60

Romantic Idiot

“Art, can we talk?” As she resolved herself, the slight trembling in her voice disappeared.

“Yeah... it seems that there’s a third party at work here trying to make us talk anyways.” I sit back, leaning on my arms, my face dripping with the fresh water.

“About the k-kiss... Are you mad?” Tessia’s face was bright red, revealing how nervous she felt compared to her firm face.

“I’m not mad. I was surprised, but I’m not mad.” I would be lying if I said I didn’t notice that Tessia liked me since all the way back when I lived with her in Elenoir.

“...”

There was brief silence where I could tell Tessia was waiting for me to say something, except, right now; I didn’t know what to say.

If I had to choose between like and dislike, of course I liked Tessia, but what did that mean? Do I just go out with her? There’s also the fact that we were both young. I mean, it wasn’t unnatural for children, especially of royalty, to get married at the age of 13-14 but it wasn’t exactly normal from where I came from.

Sigh... what’s the point in being so experienced in fighting and politics when I don’t even know where to start when it comes to something so basic like love.

“Arthur... you know what I’m waiting for, right?” She leans closer as her brow furrows. The intensity in which she was staring me made me uncomfortable but this issue wasn’t something I could keep pushing aside.

“Tess, we’ve known each other since we were four. The first time I saw you, you were getting kidnapped after you had a fight with your parents. The first thing you did when I saved you was crying your heart out. After we made our way back into your kingdom, I was fortunate enough to be able to stay in your castle, where your grandpa and eventually even your parents warmed up to me. Even now, your family and mine get

along to the point of it being weird..." I take a deep breath before I try to continue.

"I don't understand what you're trying to say." Tessia has an irritated look on her face as she puts one hand on top of mine.

"Tessia. We're still so young. I mean, I'm only twelve and you've barely turned thirteen as well! I know that it's not weird for a girl your age to get married since you are royalty, but I mean, I don't have that background." I realized I was stuttering a bit.

"Art. I know you well enough and right now, you're just making excuses. You and I both know that what I meant wasn't to get married right away. I-I just want things to progress. Even from the time we were back in Elenoir, you just treated me like I was a kid! It's been almost 8 years since then, Art... I have a lot to learn but I don't consider myself such a child anymore." Her stern gaze turned soft as she was desperately trying to reason with me.

"Sigh... It's because I've known you since we were both children that it's harder for me to see you as anything more, at least right now, Tess. It hasn't even been that long since we've met in quite a long time as well." I can feel my argument coming out more and more as petty excuses.

She lets go of my hand and springs up. I look up to see her shaking, trying to hold back tears.

"So, you're telling me that all of this time, you haven't once thought of me as anything more than a childhood friend?" She softly mutters.

"..."

I didn't know how to respond. I, of course, did try thinking of her as more than a friend, but it wasn't just about that. Although I've spent 12 years in this body, I've spent over thirty years in my past body. I've visited the orphanage I grew up in multiple times and helped take care of kids that were Tess's age.

"I see." She whispers.

I guess she thought of my silence as my answer. Tessia spins back and stomps towards the door of the training facility.

"You know, Arthur. You're so confident in so many things. Magic, fighting, using your

brain. You're so damn confident in everything you do because you're good at them. But, you know what? There are things you're not good at. You're not good at confronting your feelings. You always put on a mask and pretend you're happy or apathetic when you can't handle a certain situation. I think in that sense, you're a lot less mature than even the so called children you see in this academy. You're just using your confidence in your strong suits to mask the insecurities you have in aspects you know you're not good at!" Tears stream down Tessia's eyes as she cries this last rebuttal.

As the door closes behind her, I'm left with an eerie silence that not even the sound of the waterfall could cover.

'Papa's a dummy...' Sylvie curls up a couple of meters away, turning away from me.

I sat in front of the pond, stunned by Tessia's last words. I had to admit that in some ways, maybe Tess was more mature than I was. Even in my past life, aside from being a great fighter, I wasn't that impressive of a man. I had the charisma and character to appeal to the mass but when it came to interpersonal relationships, I consider myself mediocre on a good day. I grew up avoiding long lasting relationships, seeing them as nothing more than a burden that would eventually be used against me. In order to be the best, I had to have no weaknesses, and having a lover would eventually lead to my demise.

I've come to realize this even more since coming into this world. Having family that I would happily die for makes me think of how truly weak I am. If someone were to kidnap any one of my family members, no matter how strong I personally was, wouldn't I just be at their beck and call?

The thought of having a lover, someone I could call my other half, was a wonderful thing, but it was also something that truly scared me.

After putting back the bracelet that sealed my fire and water elemental attributes, I made my way back to the surface and headed towards my next class. How was I supposed to face Tessia in my Team Fighting Mechanics class? Even Sylvie was pouting on top of my head because I made Tess angry.

“Good to have you back, Art.” Claire ran next to me, giving me a firm slap on the back.

“Are you feeling a bit better?” Curtis also catches up to us, Grawder following behind him.

“I’ll probably have to sit out for a couple more classes, but I’m okay.” Giving him a weak smile, we arrived at the field.

“Good to see you walking, Mr. Leywin!” Professor Glory beams when she sees the three of us arrive but when she was about to walk over to us, I feel a killing intent radiating next to her.

Lucas had a harsh look on his face as he took big, confident strides towards Curtis, Claire and I.

My gaze matches his and neither of us looks away as he approaches me. Gripping my shirt up by the collar, he pulls me close to his face.

“I think we need a rematch.” His pretty blond face was a sight to behold as he scowled, my face only a few centimeters away from his.

Gripping the wrist of his hand that was holding onto my collar, I reply, my face stone cold and eyes deadlocked to his.

“This is a pretty rude way to ask for something.” I grip hard enough to make his hand lose strength, but I don’t stop there. Willing mana around me, I surround the both of us in a gale, making his knees give out.

Grimacing in pain, Lucas mumbles something inaudibly and soon has orange flames conjured in his free palm, ready to fire at me.

“That’s enough!” Professor Glory roars as she gets in the way of the two of us using her sheathed sword.

“Arthur, go rest in the viewing platform. You’re not to take part in any activities in this class until you’re fully healed, Director Goodsky’s orders. As for you Lucas, you need to calm down. Whether you want to settle your petty grudge with a fight or with a hug, do it after Arthur is fully healed. Now is not the time.” She lets out a sigh as she pushes

me softly towards the viewing platform. After walking for half a day, I didn't need my sword to lean on but I couldn't walk at a normal pace either.

Looking around, I try to find Tessia but she wasn't here. "Professor Glory, where's Princess Tessia?"

"She stopped by not too long before you came saying she wasn't feeling well. She said she would make up class somehow but she seemed off so Clive took her back to her dorm. Why? Do you know anything?" Professor Glory leans down and looks at my face.

Shaking my head, I start thinking about what I should do.

"You can get up to the viewing platform without starting another fight, right? Just rest up for a couple more days." She places a gentle hand on my shoulder before running back off towards where the rest of the class was.

I watched the class split up into different teams and get in various formations for different circumstances. In scenarios like sieging, Conjurers play a crucial role so Augmenters get into a much more defensive position, focusing solely on protecting the damage dealers. In scenarios where guerilla fights are necessary, only one or two Augmenters stay close to the Conjurer as the rest go off on their own.

The class was only a week in so it was very basic. But still, Professor Glory was teaching the class pretty well, with everyone really into the class and having fun, but I just couldn't stay focused, thinking only about how I screwed things up.

My next class was the class I was actually looking forward to the most, Deviant Magic Theory. Unfortunately, our professor, Professor Drywell placed upmost importance covering the basics first, so even after a week has passed, she was barely covering the basics of Deviant Magic.

"Whenever Deviant Magic is involved, there is a much bigger stress on the price of your magic. Why do you think that is? It's because Deviant Magic, like its name, is deviant from the natural elemental mana pool that is evident in our world. The mana that surrounds us is made up of only fire, wind, earth and water mana. Deviant magic that comes from the higher form of these four elements have a much greater cost, as I would like to say, compared to the four original elements because there is no such thing as Lightning, Plant, Gravity, Metal, Magma, Sound, or Ice mana surrounding us in the atmosphere. In order to produce these phenomena in our spells, the mage must

be able to directly alter their parent element and manipulate it into its deviant form.” Professor Drywell chattered on and on. She was a very aged lady and although she had the image of a nice quiet grandmother, she never stopped talking.

“Professor! But Gravity, Lightning, Metal, Magma, Sound, and Ice all exist naturally in our world as well. Why doesn’t our world produce these types of mana then?” A girl that looked about 17 asked the professor.

“Good question, young one! Honestly, no one knows for sure why that is! Many magic theorists believe that because a certain set of conditions must be met for those deviant elements to occur, mana directly correlated to them does not exist. Then there is the always the exceptions such as fire, where certain it does not just spontaneously without cause. Perhaps that is why most mages believe fire to be the highest form of normal magic, because it is so close to being a deviant magic itself.” She explains while pacing around the lecture hall.

“Deviation magic that strays even further from the four main elemental mana in our world comes at even a greater cost. All of you know what Emitters are. They are healers, essentially. The mana that they utilize does not fall under the category of water, earth, fire, or wind. Instead, I would dare say that there exists a holy element, or light element to be more accurate. Emitters gain little benefit from absorbing mana from the atmosphere because there is no light elemental mana within our world. Instead, they work to condense and purify the mana that forms in their mana core so that even when less mana is used, there is still a substantial effect in their spells.” I can tell Professor Drywell was running out of breath because her voice was getting higher.

After she finished her lesson for today, we had a short Q&A session but no one really had any questions to ask because we were afraid that class would never finish. Eventually Professor Drywell let us go and I trudged on to my last class, which was Spell Formations I.

Most of the students in this class were Conjurers but some of the smarter Augmenters knew that they could gain benefits in their skills by taking this class. Our teacher, Professor Mayner, was a scholarly-looking man with a monocle and mid split hair. His mustache was well trimmed and over his suit, he wore a white gown.

“Welcome students. I was notified by Director Goodsky that a student named Arthur Leywin will begin joining us for class, am I correct?” He looked around, his monocle catching the glare from the light in the classroom.

“Yes, I’m Arthur Leywin, please guide me well.” I give a small bow as he nods in approval.

“Very well! You did not miss anything too important Mr. Leywin. We were going over the different types of spell formations, from individual spell incantations to group spell formations. Care to tell us what you know about spell formations?” He adjusts his monocle as he walks towards me, his back never bending.

“To my knowledge, spell formations are the conjoining and/or altering of basic spells and skills in order produce a different phenomenon, whether that be to the user himself, or the specific point in space the spell was invoked.” I answer.

“A most solid answer indeed, Mr. Leywin. Very good!” He clapped his hands once before he went back to the front of the class where he began lesson.

“I would first like you all to imagine a scenario. Imagine a world where everyone could read everyone’s mind. The fleeting thoughts that can make even the purest man seem perverse or the nicest woman seem cruel are all laid out in the open for others to read. I believe that that world would house the best mages ever known.” He leaves all confused with this story.

“Moving on... why do Conjurers and even Augmenters chant spells? It is not the words that invoke the spell or technique. Instead, the words influence the caster’s consciousness, filling his mind with the correct ‘suggestion’ if you will that molds the mana into the desired spell.” The sound of everyone furiously scribbling in their notebooks fills the room.

Professor Mayner was a great speaker and he made the class engaged with the material he was teaching.

“To give a rather humorous example, if I were to say to a girl that liked me, ‘I have always loved you,’ the girl I said this to, you can bet that there will be some sort of reaction. The ‘incantation’, which was ‘I have always loved you’ triggers the response or the ‘spell’ from her, whether that is blushing, crying, a smile, etc.” The class roared with laughter at the metaphor, but I couldn’t help but wince.

“All in all, if the caster can control his consciousness to mold the mana into his desired spell, then incantations can be greatly shortened or they might not even need it at all! The reason Augmenters don’t need to focus so much on chanting is because the spells

they use almost always directly involves them using their own body. Conjurers, on the other hand, have to cast much more precise and complicated spells, which require these incantations so that their spells don't become totally different with a switch of a thought. That is why I said that if there was a world where everyone could read each other's minds, that world would also have the greatest of magicians. Why? Because they would have absolute control over their thoughts."

The class went on and while the Professor was a great lecturer, I wasn't able to focus as my mind kept shifting back to Tessia and what she said before leaving.

Hiding my insecurities with my confidence...

Was that what I was doing? Am I using the fact that I was a lot better at magic than everyone else as an excuse to avoid confronting what I was actually bad at?

I was being a hypocrite. I was going on about how I shouldn't see Tessia as anything more than a child but I was actually the one that needed to grow up. Getting stronger in my strong points couldn't fill in my weak points, it just made them that much more apparent in comparison.

Tess is young. She's also innocent, but that didn't mean she was ignorant. Maybe I was the ignorant one.

"Class is over! Have a great night, students. I shall see you all tomorrow!"

Even as I was walking back to my dorm, my mind was all over the place, almost tripping over myself various times.

Fuck.

I changed directions to where the student council dorms were. Running as fast as my body would let me, I arrived at the building that was much fancier than my dorm hall was.

I'm here. How do I meet Tess? It's not like I could just shout out and call for her...

'Papa, Mama is over there.' Sylvie points east with her paw and without questioning, I run in that direction.

"I'm telling you, I'm okay! Please, just let this go, Clive." I hear Tessia's voice in the

courtyard near the fountain.

“No! How dare that brat, Arthur make you cry. I knew he would only cause trouble! His poor upbringing is definitely the cause. I can’t imagine why Director Goodsky even allowed that peasant in this prestigious academy, and as a Disciplinary Committee, no less!” I vaguely make out Clive’s thin frame as he was holding onto Tessia by her wrist.

Clive notices me approaching and his face contorts into a scowl. “What the hell do you think you’re doing here? You dare try and meet Princess Tessia after you’ve made her this unwell? If it were up to me, I’d kill you right now!”

Ignoring the thin, stern-looking Vice-President, I look at Tessia who turns away. “Tess, can I have some of your time?”

“You’re ignoring me?!” Clive roars as he lets go of Tessia’s wrist and grabs onto my shoulder, when I turn and face him.

“Piss off.” I couldn’t hold in the amount of irritation I felt from this brat and my situation with Tess wasn’t making it any better. Letting out a bit too much killing intent I force Clive to jump back where he trips over himself and falls on his back.

“Y-YOU! Wh-what...” Too flustered, Clive was unable to produce anything more coherent as my gaze never left him.

“Stop. It’s not worth causing a scene over.” Tessia gets in between Clive and I and takes my hand, leading me out of the courtyard.

As I try to keep up with Tessia’s quick steps, I almost trip, my injured body still unable to do anything more than walking.

“H-hold on Tess, we’re going too fast. I’m still hurt.” I say in between breaths.

“Oh, I’m so sorry.” Tessia looks back and I can tell she was trying her best to look angry.

We were in an alley between the Director’s office and the Student Council’s Dorm when we stopped. As Tess lets go of my hand, she takes a step back and waits for me to catch my breath.

“Well? What do you want?” Tess turns her head away as she pouts.

“...”

“Tess. What you said about me, you were right. I’m now realizing that this whole time, I’ve been avoiding confronting you about your feelings. I was afraid. Magic and fighting is so much simpler, you know? The more you train, the better you get and the better outcome you see. Love... love doesn’t work that way.” I look at Tess but her expression doesn’t change.

“I was making excuses when I said that we were too young. I’m sorry. I do like you, Tess. I really do. I missed you when I got back home. I thought of you often and wondered what you were doing at the moment. The things I said earlier, they probably hurt your feelings a lot, right?” I scratch my head as Sylvie jumps off and goes on top of Tessia.

“...”

“Yes, and I’m still mad you know.” Her face was still turned but I caught her taking a quick glance at my face as her arms were still crossed.

“I’m sorry for making excuses, but can I ask you to be patient with me? I’m really no good at this, and in this aspect, I’m probably a lot less mature than you are. Can you wait for me to catch up?” I take a step forward and move my head to try and get her to look at me.

“Tch... So you say, but I bet you’re just going to find some other girl in the meantime.” She retorts while avoiding my gaze.

“I won’t do that. I promise.”

“How do you know? How am I supposed to trust that you’re not going to go and fall for someone else if I give you more time? You don’t understand, Art. I may not seem like it but I’m really selfish. I don’t want to share you. I want you all to myself!” She whips her head to me, her eyes filled with tears.

“What if you...”

My childhood friend instantly stops talking as my lips cover hers. It felt different this time compared to when she kissed me. Maybe it was because I was the one that initiated it, but it was a lot more delicate. I felt her trembling lips tense in surprise at first but then loosen in content as the side of my nose gently touched hers.

Letting go of her waist, I distance myself from her as I feel my face becoming hot.

“This is about the limit of what I can do. Like I said... I hope you can wait for me just a bit longer. I promise I won’t run off.” I say while looking down. This was the first time in both lives where I initiated a kiss, and I sure in hell wasn’t confident if I did the right thing or not.

“...”

I take a peek up at Tess’s face and see her with a glossy look in her eyes as her middle and index fingers were against her lips.

“Tess?”

“Fine, just don’t make me wait too long or I’ll be the one to run off.” She snaps out of her daze and takes a step towards me, putting on an angry face.

“Deal.” I smile in relief from finally sorting things out with Tess when she suddenly lifts her head up and pecks me on my cheek.

“??”

Taken by surprise, I didn’t know what to say.

“That was for saving me in class last week.” She lets out a soft giggle; her eyes still red from crying. Without giving me a chance to respond, she runs off into the dorm building, leaving Sylvie and me alone in the alley.

Chapter 61

My Team

TESSIA ERALITH'S POV:

Arriving at my room, I jumped into bed, my hands covering my burning face.

“EEK!” I couldn’t help out soft shrieks of delight as I roll back and forth across my sheets.

“Hehehehehe...” Oh no. I was laughing like a pervert.

But... but Art finally kissed me. He kissed me!

“Heehee...” Not being able to calm down, I wrap myself in my blanket as I roll around. The image of him leaning forward to kiss me fills my head, forcing my lips to curl upwards. It felt different from when I kissed him. I couldn’t quite explain it but it was definitely a better feeling.

“I could get used to this...” I accidentally mutter aloud as I softly rub my lips.

And when he put his arm around my waist and pulled me in to kiss me...”Kyaa!” I roll across my bed again in embarrassment as I feel shivers across my body.

I begin to imagine what our marriage will be like. I want it to be super pretty. I wonder how our kids will look like? Arthur is good looking and I’m not ugly either. It should be fine, right? But in order to get kids, we need to...

I can almost feel steam coming out my ears as I imagine it. I mean, I learned about how babies are born from my home tutor but...

Nonononono it’s too early! And besides... Arthur wanted me to give him some time. I wonder what he meant by that? Did he mean we were going to act like tonight never happened?

I don’t want that!

But am I allowed to get mad at him for that? Am I being too hard on him? I know he has my best interest at heart but I can't be so wishy-washy about this, right?

Grr... What if another girl really does end up liking him too and he chooses her? I'm just a violent, spoiled girl after all; why would he choose me?

The more I thought it, the more disheartened I became. It's okay Tess. We're both still really young. Even if it does take time, I'm sure it'll work out eventually, right?

Gah! Stop discouraging yourself and let's just sleep, Tess!

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

I've been getting used to having Sylvie waking me up. Usually a loud mental shout is enough to wake me up but today, I was woken up by a sharp bite to my nose.

"Kyu!" I groan as I wake up, rubbing my red nose as Sylvie goes back to sleep after doing her job. Sylvie seems to be a lot more active at night as she takes frequent naps throughout the day.

After washing up, I watch Elijah breath loudly in his sleep while I have to wake up this early. We can't have that now, can we?

"Good morning!" I slap my sleeping roommate on the butt.

"AHH! What? Huh?! What's going on?" Apparently, the sudden impact on his bottom made him panic, because he got into a defensive position with his right hand straight out, ready to fire at his attacker.

"Nothing! Just said good morning." I shrug, strapping on the knife to my Disciplinary Committee uniform.

"Ugh... I have another two hours before class starts. You woke me up just to say good morning?" Elijah groans as he wraps himself with his blanket into a makeshift cocoon.

"Yup! I'm off to my first Disciplinary Committee meeting!" I take one last look to make sure I wasn't forgetting anything when Elijah pops his head out from underneath his blanket.

"Did something good happen? You're a little bit too happy. It's unsettling." Whether it

was because he was studying me or just trying to focus his vision on me since he wasn't wearing his glasses, Elijah squinted his slightly puffy eyes at me.

"You're just imagining things, Elijah... haha." I quickly put on my boots and make my way towards the door.

"Suspicious..." He mumbles before he succumbs to his sleep-deprived body, going back to sleep.

Making sure no one was around, I jump off the building and use wind augmentation to cushion my landing. Sylvie just floated down, which looked really silly to me with her oversized ears flopping against the wind.

Landing on top of my head with a soft 'plop', I took some time to test my body out with some stretches. I can't say I was in great condition, but the improvement since yesterday made me nod in satisfaction. It's times like these that I really feel the effects of going through the assimilation of Sylvia's Dragon Will.

Which reminds me... I'll have to help Tess with her assimilation. How was I supposed to act around her anyways? I can't believe I kissed her yesterday.

Thinking back, I realized that even in my past life, I've never gotten past the point of kissing and it was always the other party that initiated. I never had an interest in falling in love. Rather, I feared love. Even the aspect of unattached sexual relationships, I avoided because I feared that the start of a physical relationship could lead to emotional attachments. I secluded myself in training aside from public appearances and fights, making sure I didn't have anyone I held in importance, anyone that could be used as a tool against me.

What I've learned most from this world wasn't the magic or the fighting. No, what I've realized is that this life has forced me to open up my calloused heart and allow people to hold significance to me. What this also meant was that I had to be stronger than my past self since I had people to protect this time.

Lost in my thoughts, I almost passed by the Disciplinary Committee room. The DC had access to one of the bigger rooms in the academy so that it can double as a training room as well. I was a bit late since I woke up a little later than I expected but it wasn't too loud so I hoped I wasn't the last one.

"THUD!"

As I open the door, Curtis flew and crashed into the wall next to me.

“Still too weak!” I see Theodore Maxwell’s face turn disappointed as his right fist was raised.

“Ah, Arthur! You’re here!” Claire Bladeheart, who was spectating the dual from the side, waves her hands.

“Ugh... I can’t believe I still can’t land even a single hit against you, Theodore. Oh, hey Arthur.” Curtis turns his head towards me while rubbing his back.

“Do you need help?” I put out my hand while Sylvie wags her tail but Curtis just shakes his head.

“No, I’m okay. Besides, the dual isn’t over yet.” Curtis grimaces as he gets back up to his feet and picks up his sword.

Taking a seat next Claire on one of the couches, I watch as the dual between Curtis and Theodore resumes.

“HAH!” Curtis charges forward after augmenting his sword in a blazing fire but just as he’s about to get into Theodore’s range, Curtis sidesteps instantly leaving a charred footstep behind before appearing to Theodore’s right.

Theodore’s reaction is almost immediate as he lifts his brawny right arm in an uncanny speed.

“Fall!” Curtis’ assault fails as he crumbles to his knees, his sword landing heavily on the ground in front of Theodore.

Theodore has a smirk on his face but it soon turns serious as he realizes Curtis’ plan.

“Explode!” Curtis shouts in a strained voice.

The sword that wasn’t burning but glowing in a dim red light shined brighter until flames exploded in all directions.

Claire focused on the smoke, assuming both the sword and Theodore was covered inside, but I tapped her shoulder and gestured her to look up.

Theodore was in the air with his arms a bit burned and steaming but otherwise unharmed. Using gravity magic on himself, Theodore was slowly floating down as he concentrated on his next spell.

Curtis was back up on his feet with his sword in hand, also preparing a spell using his sword. I notice Grawder restlessly swinging his tail from the other side of the room.

“All right! I think it’s time to stop!” Claire stands up and claps her hand but it didn’t seem like either one of them heard her even speak.

“Sigh... Kai, care to help me?” Claire glances back at the narrow-eyed, smiling man.

“Got it, Boss.” Kai’s sleeves covered his arms so I didn’t know what exactly he had hidden but with a swing of his arms, thin metal strings shot out towards Theodore and Curtis, forming a makeshift metal fence between them.

Augmenting my eyes, I can’t make out any specific elemental attribute in his skill, making me wonder what exactly it was that he did.

Both Curtis and Theodore stop their spells and turn their heads towards Kai in confusion.

“Boss’ orders. Let’s stop the duel now, shall we gentlemen?” Kai’s smiling face remains unchanged as he retracts the numerous strings back into his sleeves.

“What did Kai do just there?” I ask Claire who was shaking her head at Curtis and Theodore.

“No one really knows. He keeps it a secret and from what I can tell, there isn’t any specific elemental attribute in his mana whenever he uses his skills.” She responds while shrugging.

“Have you taken an interest in me, Arthur?” Kai comes behind me as he leans his head forward past my shoulder so his smiling face is right next to my face.

“Hardly. Just a bit curious as to what you just did there. It didn’t seem like you were manipulating metal, or use sound to control the metal strings.” I respond while pushing his face away from mine.

“So cold. I’d tell you but unfortunately, if I did, I’d have to kill you.” He says

nonchalantly, making me lift a brow.

Was that a challenge?

Noticing that the conversation was taking the turn for the worse, Claire butts in.

“Looks like we’re still missing quite a few people! Feyrith, Kathyln and Doradrea still aren’t here... AH there they are!” She says while pushing the both of us towards the door.

Feyrith was having a little quarrel with Doradrea about something while Kathyln came in behind them. I raised my hand to wave at Kathyln but as soon as our eyes made contact, she immediately turned her head away before walking off in another direction.

“Ah Arthur, my rival! Have you healed? I believe we still need to duel but I think it would be better to hold that off until after I finish working on a spell I’ve been practicing! It’s not because I’m scared to lose to you or anything. Just giving you more time to recover... haha. Aren’t I generous?” Feyrith comes besides me putting his arm on my shoulder but refuses to look me in the eyes while making excuses.

“Now that everyone is here, I’d like you all to come sit down so we can start the meeting.” Claire ushers us towards the round table on the second floor.

The room consisted of two levels. The lower level was just a wide area with all sorts of equipment and also an arena for practice matches. To the side where the equipment was a flight of stairs that led to a second floor balcony that overlooked the lower level. On the second floor were a chalkboard, some cabinets and a big, oval table with exactly 8 seats.

Claire sat at the very end of the table with the chalkboard behind her while Kai and Theodore sat to her right and left. I didn’t really know if there was an assigned seating arrangement so I stayed standing, waiting for everyone else to sit down first. On Kai’s side sat Curtis and Feyrith while on Theodore’s side sat Doradrea and Kathyln. The only seat available was directly opposite of Claire’s seat so I just took my seat there and waited for the meeting to commence, my drowsiness from being up so early slowly overtaking my body.

I glanced over at Sylvie who hopped off my head and began playing with Grawder until our leader began talking.

“This is the first meeting with everyone present, as well as the first day where we will actively start duty.” Claire announces in a serious voice.

“Although this is the first year that this Committee has existed, I’ve been working with Director Goodsky and our Student Council President on how we should efficiently structure and run the Disciplinary Committee in order to create an environment in this academy that will not tolerate bullying, dissented duels as well as intruders. For that, we decided to split the Disciplinary Committee into two teams. These two teams are separated by underclassmen and upperclassmen. The upperclassmen, which includes Theodore, Curtis, Kai and myself will split into pairs and watch over the campus in the morning since we don’t have classes. The underclassmen: Kathyln, Feyrith, Doradrea and Arthur, will also split into two teams and go around campus during the afternoon while the upperclassmen have classes.” Claire writes all of our names on the board in the teams she has already decided on.

Before I fully raise my hand, Claire already knows what I’m about to say and interjects.

“Since Arthur is taking both upper division and lower division classes, he will be waived from that duty. However, he is to be on standby at all times in case backup is needed. Also, I’ve gotten permission from Director Goodsky to allow you to be 10 minutes late to classes, so just take your time between classes and be on the lookout for any troubles.” She smiles in satisfaction as my hand goes down.

“This being said, I’ve already discussed the matter of who will be scouting the campus alone between the underclassmen and Kathyln has volunteered to take on this task. Kathyln, remember that even though the upperclassmen are in class we will still help you. You are a part of the Disciplinary Committee so if you’re caught in a situation where you’re not confident in being able to handle it yourself, call for help.” She turns her gaze to Kathyln while saying this. Our Princess just nods while Curtis has a slight look of concern on his face.

“How are we going to communicate with each other?” Feyrith raises his hand while talking.

“We haven’t told you guys yet but if you imagine of any of the members in the Disciplinary Committee while placing your hand on the insignia on the sheath of your knife, the recipient’s knife will emit a bright light and a soft shock, notifying them who is in trouble. Each of the Disciplinary Committee members’ knife has a distinct color so remember them well.” While Claire announces this, she begins writing the different

colors that our DC knife will glow in depending on who asked for help.

Claire – Pink

Kai – Silver

Theodore – Yellow

Feyrith – Green

Doradrea – Dark Red

Curtis – Red

Kathryn – Blue

Arthur – Black

I wondered how a black light would look while she wrote down what color the DC member's knife would glow in if I called for him or her but everyone else's colors were pretty self-explanatory and corresponded with their elements for the most part. It seemed like Feyrith got the green color because of him being an elf. I wonder if that can be considered racist.

"The last matter of business is surveillance at night. I know that this might be a bit too much for one person so we'll be taking turns in pairs with this task." Our leader looks around for anyone in case there are disagreements to this.

"Can I volunteer to take over my sister's shift as well? Call me overprotective but I'm not comfortable knowing Kathryn might be in danger while I'm fast asleep." Curtis speaks up while scratching his head but looks at me specifically.

"Are you sure you can handle that, Curtis? It's going to be tough doing two people's shifts at night." Claire looks at him with a concerned look on her face.

I look over at Kathryn and I can sort of tell that she wants to interject but keeps silent.

"Kathryn is my partner for night duties, right? I can do it by myself." I speak up, knowing the real reason Curtis wanted to take over his shift. I can sort of understand from his perspective being an older brother myself.

"You don't have to..." Kathryn stands up and speaks but I could tell she was conflicted and couldn't find the words to say after.

"Hmm... well, since Kathryn is scouting by herself during the afternoon, I think this would be fair. Okay, I'll allow it, but Arthur, Kathryn, I can already tell you two are the type to try and handle things on your own but I'm requesting as the leader that you to

call for help immediately as soon as you think you need it." She leans forward on the table as she states her conditions in a firm voice.

Kathryn stares at me but I just look at Claire and respond with a nod, closing this subject.

"Okay, since all of the technical matters are settled, you guys are free to leave or stay here and practice until classes start. The room will always be open for DC members so think of this as a second house! I've already camped here for a couple of nights haha!" Claire scratches the back of her head in embarrassment.

I let out a deep breath in relief. Looks like I can have a little less than an hour of sleep before my first class starts. There were a couple of couches that looked perfect for a power nap on the lower floor.

Curtis gives me a meaningful pat on my back before he goes down but as I walk down behind him, I feel a tug on my pant waist from behind.

"Let's spar for a bit, pretty boy! I've sparred with everyone else here but you." Doradrea gives me an excited grin as she drags me from behind onto the area designated as the sparring arena.

"I'm still not fully healed Doradrea, I don't think this is the best idea." I groan as I'm dragged helplessly.

"Stop being a baby! The best way to get rid of that soreness is to move around, don't you know?" She lets me go and walks over to the other side of the arena.

Claire comes towards us and looks at me. She was about to stop the spar when Theodore walks past her and goes towards where Doradrea was stretching.

"Move it." He growls.

"Aww... no fair." Doradrea grumbles as she slumps her shoulders, disappointed.

Great. A muscular male replaces my muscular female opponent.

Claire just sighs in defeat. "All right but Arthur is injured so this will only go on for a minute. Let me activate the barrier this time so we don't have any more cracked walls." She looks at Curtis who just chuckles.

Sylvie, who was riding on top of Grawder, asks if I'll be okay so I just nod in response.

I may be injured but I was excited since I've wanted to duel against Theodore as well. I figure fighting against deviants might help me learn a thing or two from them.

"Anything you want to say before we start?" Theodore barks while he cracks his neck.

"Sure. Can I call you Theo if I win? It's only fair for me to give you a nickname since you already gave me one, right?" I give him a smirk while I stretch my still aching body.

I can literally see veins popping on his head, as everyone's expression turns surprised.

I wonder why everyone's that shocked. Come on... Theo isn't nearly as bad as being called twerp.

"You sure are full of yourself, twerp. Fine, but if I win, you're going to be my little minion for the rest of your school life." He has a confident smile on his face as the rest of the DC members all got situated around the arena.

"Remember, this duel will last one minute or until someone lands the first. That's final!" Claire barks as she unsheathes her sword and stabs it in the ground.

The both of us nod in consent and Claire signals for the duel to begin.

As Theodore charges towards me, I augment my body using wind attribute mana to skirt around the arena, keeping my distance. Theodore's gravity magic wasn't something to take light of since his powers have simultaneous offensive and defensive powers.

It usually takes a bit longer to use earth magic while also using wind magic. I will shards of earth the size of my leg and kick a couple of them towards Theodore while I kick the rest further and further away from him. I needed to gauge how far he can use his gravity manipulation and how much stronger it was.

Theodore didn't really get what I was doing as he kept charging at me, growing more and more frustrated from me running away and kicking rocks at him.

"Do you think I'll let you keep running around?" He roars as the rocks that I kicked towards him all started floating.

Theodore kicks off and while the decrease in gravity around him increases his speed tremendously. He fell for it a lot faster than I thought he would.

I will the earth around me one last time while jumping backwards and send a boulder the size of my body flying directly at him a kick. Theodore smacks the rock up easily with the decreased gravity but in that moment where his vision was blocked, I dashed directly towards him.

Draft Step was a foot technique that was inspired from the Flicker Step, the dash skill using fire magic. Draft Step allowed me to either suddenly accelerate or change direction using a force of wind directly against my foot to use as a sort of platform. I couldn't use this spell if I was moving too fast but with practice, I hope to be able to instantaneously change directions freely, even in the air.

Theodore's annoyed expression changes to surprise when he realized I was almost in arm's length of him with my right fist surrounded by a condensed sphere of wind.

"Fall!" He snarls as he clenches his right hand into a fist as well.

The sudden change in gravity knocks the wind out of me as I stumble a bit forward to regain balance.

With a victorious grin on his wild, unshaven face, he takes one last step to get in range to punch me when I shoot him a smirk and point upwards with my finger in response.

"BOOM!"

The boulder that Theodore knocked up fell directly on top of him from the abrupt change in gravity. The weight of the rock from the increased gravity flattened Theodore flat on his stomach in an almost comical position.

"STOP!"

Claire gets in between the two of us and checks up on Theodore, who already regained consciousness and removed the rock on top of him. He would probably get a big bruise on his back but his mana-enhanced body allowed him to avoid any serious injury. The rock wasn't too big after all.

"Good duel, Theo." I squat down and pat him on the shoulders before bouncing out of the room with Sylvie trotting behind me.

‘Let’s go find a bench to take a nap on.’ I say to Sylvie.

“Kyu!”

Chapter 62

Baby Steps

“Did you guys do your homework?” I sat down on top of the podium so I could get a better view of the class while I fixed my hair.

I slept through most of my Fundamentals of Mana Manipulation class so I feel a lot better. As I look around from the center of the stage, I see my students looking at each other in hopes that they have the answer to the questions I asked them yesterday.

“Looks like there’s no choice but for me to answer the question.” Feyrith finally sighs before standing up.

“The mana core is an excellent way to easily and accurately measure the level of the mage’s power because it is correlated to how much effort and time that mage has spent on condensing and refining mana from their surroundings into their core.” He finishes off with a swish of his hair while sitting down.

“No.” I hop off from the podium and walk towards the shocked Feyrith.

“It certainly is an easy way to gauge the mage’s power but it’s far from accurate. Princess Kathyln, if you see an ordinary fighter that stood at two meters and weighed almost three hundred pounds full of muscles, what is your assessment on that fighter?” I turn my gaze towards the Princess that was sitting next to the embarrassed elf.

“I can expect the fighter to have robust strength.” She finally says after pondering over the simple question.

“Correct! All we can tell is that the oaf is probably freakishly strong. Does that say anything else about his combat ability? Yes, he’s strong, but in order to be a great combatant, there are other factors such as agility, technique, mental fortitude, experience, etc. The stage a mage’s mana core is at only determines how much ‘muscles’ he or she has, but it doesn’t much else about the other factors. Refining your mana core to higher stages is still important, of course, but if that’s the only factor you use in gauging your opponent’s level, you’re setting yourself up for defeat.” I see some

students start jotting down notes so I catch my breath.

The nerdy girl with glasses raises her hand after she finishes writing down her notes. "Question!" She asks.

"Yes, Miss. Myrtle?" I find it amusing how much her name suits her character.

"If trying to sense the opponent's mana core isn't an accurate way of gauging his or her level, what do we do?" She has this face that seems to say 'try that question on for size'.

"You don't. Just assume that the opponent is stronger than you. Gauging the mana core stage of anyone should just be used to satiate your curiosity but it really doesn't help. Even if sensing the mana core level can accurately gauge the fighting strength of your opponent, what are you going to do if your opponent's fighting strength is lower than yours? Go easy on him? Pick on him because you know you'll win? What do you do if his fighting strength is higher than yours? Run away? Chances are, if you're in a situation where both of you are actively sensing each other's mana core, then running away won't be an option." I pause for a minute.

"Being overconfident because you find out that your mana core is higher than your opponents can make you careless while getting scared if your opponent's mana core is higher than yours will just make you feel hopeless. Bottom line is, life isn't so simple that you can accurately know whether or not you can beat someone based on the color of someone's mana core. There are cases of fighters beating careless mages because the mages got sloppy from being too arrogant. ALWAYS assume the opponent is stronger than you and try your best. If that opponent was weaker than you, then you put an end to the fight quickly to save him the humiliation. If that opponent was stronger, congratulations, you've overcome the mental limit you guys have been holding onto all your lives." I feel like some inspiration speaker rather than a lecturer.

I walk over back to the podium where Sylvie was now taking a nap on and continue speaking.

"Now, for the next homework. Any of you figure out what I did last class with the two wind spells?" I ask, leaning back against the podium.

Silence

"Sigh..." I guess being spoon-fed answers all their lives really took a toll on their critical

thinking skills.

“I’ll do a little demonstration for the Augmenter’s answer first.” Rolling Sylvie to the side, I take out two pieces of paper from underneath her. I crumple one of the papers into a small ball and show it to the class.

“Watch.” I put the ball on my right palm and inhale deeply, building the suspense.

“Fwoo.” Utilizing all of the air in my lungs I manage to blow the crumpled ball of paper about a meter away from me.

“ ... ”

The students stare at me with a blank face from the anticlimactic outcome.

Holding my fingers up to silence any students about to argue what the point of that was, I roll the other paper I had into a tube. Packing the ball tightly into the back end of the tube, I inhale deeply one more time.

“FWOOM!” The crumpled ball of paper shoots out more than 10 meters in front of me before bouncing on the ground.

““AH!”” Some of the students had light bulbs go off in their heads as their expressions brighten up in understanding. I hide my grin when I see Kathlyn’s face also brighten up as she starts jotting down notes. As for Feyfey, he still has a question mark bobbing on top of his head because his face looks clueless as before.

“Since many of you seem to understand what I just did, can someone please enlighten the rest of the class?” I say as I walk up to pick up the pieces of paper I littered.

“It has to do with concentrating mana into a small point, then compressing it and shooting it out, right Professor?” A shy looking girl with a huge spear next to her responds quietly.

She called me Professor!

“Correct! Augmenter’s are raised to utilize the many mana channels that they have so we unconsciously use a lot of our mana channels for many of our spells, diluting it. It doesn’t matter so much when you use it on your body but the spell is weakened greatly when attempted to cast a long-range spell.” I demonstrate by widening the paper tube

I rolled up. Blowing through one end, the ball I put inside loosely just drops down in front of me.

“It’ll be hard to get used to at first but being able to better control your mana channels will help you greatly. Now, for Conjurers’ turn.” I pick up the crumpled piece of paper I littered.

“Since Conjurers naturally have much less mana channels compared to their mana veins, they naturally shoot their spells in a compressed form, whether it’s out of their body directly, or by affecting an area to have the mana alter it into the form of their desired spell. What Conjurers need to do is utilize the raw amount of mana that they can absorb to compensate their lack of mana channels. Close your eyes and try to imagine this.” I see everyone confused but shut their eyelids nonetheless as they wait for my next instructions.

“Imagine both Conjurers’ and Augmenters’ bodies to be a pool of water. We’ll say that leaves are particles of mana. For an Augmenter’s body, just picture small bundles of leaves being dropped in various locations over the pool. While these bundles may be small, because there are so many, they begin to spread and join the other leaves that spread from other directions until the surface of the water is covered in leaves. That is the essence of body enhancement. Now, for Conjurers, imagine just one humungous ball of leaves dropped into the pool of water. Because it comes from a single location, it may take longer for it to spread, but in the end, the leaves will still be able to cover the surface of the pool. That is how body enhancement works for Conjurers.” The class remains silent as the students open their eyes and think over what I just said.

“The reason why all of you Conjurers injured yourselves while trying to absorb the spell you conjured is because you didn’t use the mana from your core. The only mana that you’re completely immune to is the mana refined in your mana core. Even that, after your mana influences the environment into a spell, can hurt you. Therefore, Conjurers will need to utilize both mana from the atmosphere and mana from their mana core into a spell and integrate it into their body or drop the big pile of leaves to make it spread over the pool of water.” As I finished explaining, I motioned for the class to come down onto the stage and start practicing. For the rest of the class, I went around helping them while giving them little tips on how to better visualize what they need to do.

After the giant bell rang, signaling that the class was over, Sylvie stirred awake and hopped on top of my head as I dismissed class. I was surprised some students actually

complained that the class was too short. I guess I was doing something right.

I took the long route to my next class to take up more time while I did a broad surveillance. I messed around with sending very faint pulses of wind to try and use it as a sort of 3D radar but my limit for now was around 20 squared meters, which wasn't very useful since I could see that far anyway. Earth Pulse wasn't as useful since I can only detect the very basics like, how many people were in the area, not if they were actually in combat or not and the buildings and trees diluted the accuracy.

Arriving to Gideon's class late, he just motions for me to hurry on to my seat before he resumes talking.

"Hey. Why are you so late?" Emily whispers to me.

"Disciplinary Committee duties. I have to go around school until ten minutes after class starts." I respond, lowering my voice so Gideon doesn't hear.

"All right! Let's get in pairs and work on our project. The materials are in the back but don't all of you go all at once." He takes a seat and starts reading over something while the class stands up to get the materials needed for the Light-Producing Artifact, or LPA. I was about to walk over as well when Emily stops me.

"I already have all of the materials we need for an LPA. Let's just get started." She rummages through her oversized bag before finding the various necessary components. After laying out all of the things we needed, she looked at me and pointed with her lips to get moving.

Building the LPA wasn't easy but Emily seemed fairly impressed by how fast I caught on. Even if she was a twelve year old, her being a genius and all made me a bit happy.

The rest of class was spent with tinkering around with some of the various parts to artifacts that Emily brought with her until Gideon dismissed us. As I was about to leave, he grabbed me by the back of my shirt and pulled me towards him.

"Brat. Let's catch up sometime. We have a lot to talk about." He gives me a devious grin but otherwise just pats me on the back.

"Mhmm. We should grab some coffee, Professor." I wave back before leaving the room with Emily.

‘Papa, Avier told me to head over to the training room again.’ Sylvie thumps my nose with her paw to grab my attention.

‘Is Avier Director Goodsky’s green owl? How can you talk with it?’ I ask my bond but she doesn’t really know why either.

“Hey Emily, I have to head over to the library so I’ll be skipping lunch. Go ahead without me!” I wave at my friend.

“Do you want me to go with you?” She looks at me but I just shake my head.

“It’s fine. Go find Elijah for me! He’ll be lonely if I’m not there.” I give her a smile before running off in the direction of the library/training rooms.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Leywin.” Chloe greets me with a professional smile and a bow before motioning me to the back door.

“Nice to see you again, Chloe.” I smile back, following behind her with Sylvie wagging her tail on top of my head.

After passing by the scary man, I made my way downstairs without the help of Chloe this time. ‘Hopefully Elijah won’t be too bored hanging out with Emily, right Sylv?’

“Kyu~” ‘He’ll be okay!’ my bond reassures me.

As I place my right palm against the giant cold doors after reaching my room, a bright light once again greets me.

“Boo!” Tessia jumps from the side of the door with her hands out wide.

“Hey, Tess.” I respond nonchalantly.

“Aww... you weren’t scared. No fun.” She grumbles while catching Sylvie who jumped off my head.

“Haha. You’ll have to try a lot better than that. Come on, let’s get started with your assimilation.” I push her towards the center of the training room. It’s amazing how dense the air was with mana in this room compared to outside. Even the very fact that there was grass and a waterfall put me in awe every time I came in.

“How’s your body been feeling lately? Are you still getting symptoms of rejection from your Beast Will?” I ask while Tess takes a seat near the pond.

“I haven’t gotten it ever since the last time we were here...” She responds but turns quiet afterwards.

“Hey, Art?” Turning her head back, I see Tess’ long grey eyelashes fluttering over her distinct teal eyes.

“Hmm?”

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Well... compared to you, I’m so emotional and so I feel like you get overwhelmed and just end up following my selfishness.” Tess’ gaze shifts down as she says this.

“Ah, so you do know.” I smirk in response, which earns me a smack to my arm.

“We’ve known each other for how long, Tess? At this point, you can trust that you’ve seen all sides of me, even the ones I don’t want to show. Even knowing that, the fact that you accept me and have patience with me, I’m grateful. Don’t ever think that what I’m doing is out of obligation.” Ruffling the downhearted princess’s hair, we begin the assimilation.

Tess’ mana core has come a long way. At her age, being a solid orange stage Conjurer is on the level of being classified as a genius. While she isn’t able to refine her mana core until the assimilation is over, it shouldn’t affect her too much. While mine took years, I estimate that with my help, it should only take a couple more weeks for her to completely assimilate with the Elderwood Guardian’s beast will.

“Let’s end it here today.” I pat Tess’ back to signal that we were done.

“Thanks.” Tess shoots me a shy smile as we both sit in the grass, the only sound coming from the waterfall and Sylvie’s soft breathing.

“I-I know you said to give you time but, do you think I can maybe hold your hand right now? Just for a bit? If not, it’s okay I-I won’t be mad.” Tess couldn’t look me in the eyes while stuttering. While her hair was covering her face, she couldn’t hide her red ears

poking slightly out.

I gently grab Tess' right hand with my left and squeeze firmly. While our fingers weren't interlocked, the warmth from her hands spread onto mine.

"Is this okay?" I try to take a peek at Tess' face but she leaves it covered. I couldn't help but smile when she nodded her head furiously in response to my question.

For a couple of seconds, time seemed to go slower as we just sat there, hands locked.

Chapter 63

Field Trip

For the past several weeks, nothing noteworthy happened, yet I was kept busy enough to not have time to visit my family. Disciplinary Committee duties took up all of the time that I had remaining aside from school and training.

The class that I taught had a harder time than I expected when it came to divergent training, which I named it. The whole aspect of focusing mana into a single point proved to be difficult for all of the Augmenters in the class while reabsorbing a conjured spell was even more arduous of a task for the Conjurers.

So far, out of the Augmenters, only a student named Benson managed to do anything remotely close to what I had in mind. As for the Conjurers, only Kathyln succeeded in reabsorbing her spell and enhancing her body. Even then, she only succeeded in “augmenting” her hand. Feyrith was a close second as he was the only other student on the brink of success.

My Deviant Magic Theory class has been moving along quite slowly as our Professor explicitly explained that she will cover new material after we finish our mid-semester tests. Since a semester is 16 weeks long and we’ve only gone through 4 weeks of school, it’ll take another 4 weeks until she’ll start going over what I want know.

“Are you excited for the excursion trip we’re going to have this weekend?” Tess leans in closer as she asks.

The two of us, along with Sylvie, were inside the training room during lunch. I had just finished helping her with assimilation. By my estimation, Tess needs about one or two more weeks to fully assimilate, which worries me because, until then, she is very limited in how much magic she can use.

“Hmm? Eh, we’re only exploring the first three floors, right? I doubt we’ll find anything worth getting excited over.” I just shrug.

This Saturday, we were to have a one-night trip to the outskirts of the Beast Glades with our Team-Fighting Mechanics class. Professor Glory received permission from

Director Goodsky on the condition that we were not allowed to go past the third floor of the dungeon we planned on exploring.

The dungeon was a minor one and a popular site for new Adventurers since the mana beasts in the upper levels were only E class so Professor Glory thought it would be a great way to have the class get in some real life team-fighting mechanics practice.

“Pshhh... You’re no fun. I bet you’re actually really nervous that we’ll be in the Beast Glades. I heard about it a lot from Grandpa. He says that it’s filled with a lot of mysteries and wonders but also dangers. Grandpa said to never truly trust any source of information about the Beast Glades because it always changes.” Tess gets lost in her thoughts about how exciting our short trip was going to be.

“We’re going to be fighting against real mana beasts! Can you believe it? I mean, I’ve fought against a couple in Elshire Forest while I was training with Grandpa but I heard Mana Beats are different in the Beast Glades, you know, more vicious. We’re going to be sleeping in the dungeon too! That’s so exciting!” Her eyes begin to sparkle as she imagines camping underground, surrounded by mana beasts.

Giving her a soft flick to her forehead, I wake Tess up from dreamland. “Just remember, you’re probably not even at half your strength right now and the assimilation isn’t going to be in time for the class expedition. Don’t get full of yourself.”

“Oww... I know I know! Sheesh, you don’t have to baby me so much.” She pouts while rubbing her forehead.

“Do you remember when we slept together in the same tent?” My face turns into an evil grin as Tess’ face turns red immediately.

“Kyu?” Sylvie tilts her head in curiosity since she wasn’t born when this happened.

“What did you say again? Ahh!” Putting on a frightened face, I look at my blushing childhood friend.

“A-Arthur? W-well! You see... beasts will more likely appear if they notice you because they will see that you are a child. Therefore, I propose that for our s-safety that it would be better for you to c-come inside the tent.” I say in a high-pitched voice, mocking Tess.

“Uuu! You asked for it!” She jumps on top of me and starts poking me hard as I continue

laughing.

“Owowowow! Hahaha~ okay! I’m sorry I give, I give! Tess... hahaha... I’ll stop!” Tears form in my eyes as I continue laughing and crying in pain.

“Kyu!” ‘Me too, I want to play too!’ Sylvie hops around us.

Eventually, she comes to a stop as I lay panting on the ground, catching my breath with Tess sitting on top of me. Looking at my childhood friend, I notice that her face was still red. Realizing almost immediately after what sort of position we were in, I couldn’t help but get hot as well, as Tess lowers her head closer to mine.

“Hoho~ I see you two are getting along well. Virion will surely be happy.” The voice catches the both of us by surprise and Tess immediately gets off me while we distance ourselves from each other in embarrassment.

Director Goodsky walks up to us with an amused look on her face. How she got in without either of us noticing is beyond me but I couldn’t hide the awkwardness in my face as she looked at me.

“Fufu~ how is the assimilation going?” Saving us some face, Director Goodsky changes the topic.

“It-it’s going well! Art helped me a lot these past couple of weeks and I feel a lot better! I haven’t been feeling any pains from the rejection lately and as long as I don’t use magic too much, I think I’ll be okay!” The flustered Tess scrambles her words as she flails her arms to hide her embarrassment.

“She should be fully assimilated with her beast will in about a week or two.” I clarify after calming myself.

“Hmmm...” Director Goodsky nods at me before she kneels down in front of the still red Tess. Gently placing her hand above Tess’ stomach, Director Goodsky closes her eyes to sense Tess’ mana core.

After a brief moment, she retracts her hand and nods, satisfied. “Good, good. I’m glad that there were no troubles along the way. I knew I could trust you, Arthur.” She says to me before getting back up.

“Where have you been these past couple of weeks though, Director? You were always

in contact from what I heard, but I noticed you haven't been inside the Academy for a while now. Did you just get back?" I say, tilting my head. My eyes couldn't help focusing on the small cut she had on her other hand.

"Ah yes. I've been away for some personal reasons. I am back now though, so come to my office if you need anything." Director Goodsky quickly covers her hand and gives me a soft, grandmotherly smile.

"I better get going now, though. I have a lot of work to catch up on. Be sure not to overexert yourself, little one. Be especially careful while you are inside the dungeons. One should never underestimate even the lowest level mana beasts." Director Goodsky gently pats Tess' hair before disappearing with a wisp.

"S-so what are your plans after this?" Tessia says, trying to break the awkward silence that the Director left us in.

"After classes, there's an emergency meeting for the Disciplinary Committee since Curtis, Claire and I are going to be away from campus over the weekend. We'll have to work on some of the details in case an emergency arises while the three of us aren't here. After that, I'll probably go back home for the first time and sleep there. I'll get back to campus by tomorrow morning in time to head out for the excursion. What about you?" I say while leaning back.

"Well, Professor Glory said there won't be any class today since she wanted us to rest for the excursion tomorrow so I'm free until the Student Council meeting. We have to go over a couple of things on the agenda since both Clive and I won't be there either." Tess responds a lot more calmly now. I had to admit she was pretty cute while she was playing with Sylvie's paws.

After spending a bit more time talking to Tess, I eventually had to leave to go to my remaining classes. Even though we didn't have our Team-Fighting Mechanics class, my other two classes seemed to drag on forever as we already started reviewing for our mid-semester exams.

"That will be it for today, class. Remember to keep up with your studying instead of procrastinating and cramming it all on the night before. I know you all love doing that." Professor Mayner says sarcastically as he hands out some review sheets on basic spell formations. After my last class was over I trudged on towards the Disciplinary Committee room with Sylvie weighing down particularly heavily on my head tonight.

“I trust that you guys will be able to handle keeping the Academy in check while the three of us are out. We’ve been through a couple of the emergency procedures these past two weeks so I’m confident that everything will be fine. As you all know, Kai is in command while I am out. Remember that Director Goodsky is back and on campus so if things go for the worse, don’t hesitate to have her help, although, unless it’s serious, I doubt there will be a need to. Dismissed!” Claire claps her hands as the rest of us get up.

“Twer... I mean Arthur. I want another practice match with you.” Theo places a hand on my shoulder as I head down the stairs.

“No! It’s my turn. You lost to him last time so I get to try now!” Doradrea squeezes in between us and looks up at me with her masculine face.

“Grr... That didn’t count! It was a lucky break that he just had, that’s all.” Theo refuted, his face red from both anger and embarrassment.

“No can do, Theo, Doradrea. I’m going home to my family tonight. My driver is already waiting for me outside of the Academy.” I shrug, hopping down the stairs without giving them the time to convince me to stay.

“You have the protection ring that Father gave you, right? Use it immediately if you feel like you’re in trouble. Promise me that, okay?” I hear Curtis worriedly nag at his younger sister. We’ll be leaving early tomorrow morning so tonight was probably the last time he’d be able to see her until we get back Sunday night.

Kathlyn just responds with a silent nod, her face expressionless as always. She catches me looking at the both of them and quickly turns her head away. Curtis leaves his sister and walks towards me.

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning then, Arthur. I heard Professor Glory was thinking of assigning teams. Let’s join the same team if we can.” Giving me a fist bump to my arm.

“Yeah, sounds good.” Giving him a friendly nod, I walk out after giving everyone a wave.

It was already pretty dark outside with the only source of light coming from the soft glow of the floating orbs. The campus grounds gave off a very mystical feeling at night, totally different from how the world was in my previous life.

Upon reaching the main gate to the academy, a familiar driver was waiting for me.

“Good evening Mr. Arthur. I take it that you have prepared everything?” He says while taking off his hat and giving me a slight bow.

“Yeah. The meeting ran a little late so let’s leave right away.” I get in the carriage after my driver opens the door for me.

I dozed off during the ride back home so it felt like the familiar Helstea mansion came into view a lot faster than I expected.

“We have arrived, Mr. Leywin. Have a great night.” Opening the door, the polite driver tips his hat once again as I step off the carriage. Walking up the stairs brought up nostalgic thoughts of when I came back from the kingdom of Elenoir and when I came back from the Dire Tombs. This was probably the first time coming back home in a while without giving my parents a reason to worry for my life.

Before even having the chance to knock, the giant front door swings open and an Ellie missile shoots out at a speed that surprised me.

“BROTTTHERRR! Welcome hommeeeee!” Ellie wraps her arms around my waist as I muster up the strength to keep the both of us from toppling down the stairs.

“Kyu!” Sylvie hops off of my head and onto Ellie’s, licking her face.

“Haha~ that tickles, Sylvie.” My sister unwraps herself from me as she holds Sylvie and tickles her back.

“I was wondering what the noise was; you’re back a little late, Son!” My father leans against the front door and gives me a grin.

“The meeting ran a little late. It’s been a while, Dad.” I give my father a hug as my sister follows behind me, still cuddling with my bond.

“Ah! You’re back, Art. You must be so tired.” My mother, who was upstairs, runs down and kneels in front of me, giving me a long hug.

“Hey, Mom. Yeah, I’m back.” I smile, accepting the family love I cherished so much.

“How’s your body? Are you all better now?” My mother examines my body, lifting up my shirt and turning me around to make sure I didn’t have a wound left on me.

“Haha, I’m fine now. You’re worrying too much.” I give her a comforting smile but I can’t help remember the short conversation I had with my father about why Mother wasn’t able to heal me back then. I shake the thoughts out of my head though. I’m sure there was a reason and the only thing I could do was wait for her to tell me.

“Brother, how long are you staying?” Ellie is practically hopping around me as we all head towards the living room.

“I’m leaving early tomorrow morning.” I let out a sigh.

“Wha~at? Why?” My sister’s face visibly saddens, her shoulders slumping at my response.

“Yeah, why are you leaving so soon?” My father chimes in, taking a seat on the sofa.

“One of my classes has an excursion trip to the Beast Glades tomorrow for one night. We leave in the morning tomorrow so I’ll have to head out pretty early at dawn.” I was already tired at the thought of waking up that early.

“The Beast Glades?!” My mother’s face turns pale in concern. I wasn’t surprised since I almost died the last time I was in the Beast Glades. Even my father had a worried look on his face.

“Don’t worry. We’re only going to be in the outskirts and our Professor will be with us at all times. Besides, I still have the ring.” I pull out the ring that the Helstea family gave to us from my pocket. The ring used mana circulation to indicate to the other person whether I was still alive or not. I kept it off while I was at school since I didn’t really have a need for it but I brought it just in case.

“But still... is it mandatory for you to go?” My mother furrows her brows, as the concern doesn’t leave her face.

“We’ll be fine. It’s one of the lowest ranked dungeons and we’re not allowed to go below the third floor anyways.” I comfort my mother.

She still wasn’t entirely happy with the whole situation but she just keeps silent, giving me a hesitant nod. The four of us spent a few more hours just catching up while Sylvie fell asleep on Ellie’s lap. Ellie was apparently doing well in her ladies school while my father and mother both still looked very healthy and in love. It’s only been a few weeks since I’ve last seen them so there weren’t really any surprises. Asking where the

Helstea family was, Father said that Vincent and Tabitha were both out for a couple of days on a business trip to a different city.

Eventually my parents ushered my sister and I into our rooms since it was pretty late. I almost fell asleep while taking a shower and after drying myself; I couldn't help but let out a big sigh of relief after sinking into bed.

It was good to be back home.

"Knock" "Knock"

I turn my head, too tired to get up and I see a small head peeking out from the other side of the door.

"C-can I sleep with you tonight, Brother?" Ellie walks in with her arms clinging onto a stuffed animal.

"Sure." I smile, lifting the blanket next to me so she can get under.

"Hehe, yay." Ellie jumps into the bed, making herself comfortable. The bed was more than big enough for the both of us but she scooted in close and faced me.

"Goodnight." Patting my baby sister's head, the both of us fall asleep to each other's breathing.

Chapter 64

Widow's Crypt (1)

"BROTHER! WAKE UP!!" My sister's voice echoed through my head as she screamed at the top of her lungs directly next to my ear.

"What? What's going on?" My eyes still half closed, I look back and forth to see if there was an emergency.

"Sheesh! You suck at waking up, Brother." Ellie probably woke up not too long ago, evident by her bed hair.

"Haha, you hair looks crazy." I shoot her a grin as I ruffle her hair.

"Eek! Stop it! Your hair looks weird too!" My little sister gets out of bed and escapes out of my room. Before closing the door behind her, she reminds me to hurry and wash up.

"Aye aye!" I give my sister an exaggerated salute, making her giggle before going downstairs.

Sylvie woke up on her own from my sister's shouting but her eyes kept blinking slowly as she unstably toddled behind me.

After washing up and making sure I had the few basic necessities on me, which included my seal bracelet, my dimension ring with Dawn's Ballad stored inside, the ring used to signal Mother, and Sylvia's feather wrapped around my bond mark.

Sylvia's feather probably isn't really needed to cover the bond mark, but I liked to keep it on me just as a memento. Having a part of Sylvia with me comforted me.

Walking downstairs, my nose picks up on the soft scent of some sort of soup. When I reach the kitchen, I see my parents and little sister sitting on the table, their face still tired from being up early at dawn.

"Hope you don't mind. The chef is cooking breakfast for you. We're probably going to

go back to sleep after we see you off.” My mother gives me a tired smile.

“Not at all. In fact, you really didn’t have to wake up and see me off.” I take a seat across from my mother, next to my sister.

“Be vigilant, no matter how easy you think the dungeon may be. It’s called a dungeon because you never know of the dangers inside.” My father warns me, his beard hair ablaze.

Looking back at my mother, I notice the strain on her face as I can almost feel her contemplating something inside her head. “...Just, please, be careful Arthur. I know how strong you are but I can’t stand it every time I see you hurt, it’s just that...” Her voice fades at the end.

“Hmm?” I had the feeling that she was thinking about what my father said in the hospital room back at Xyrus Academy; the thing that made her unable to heal anyone seriously injured.

“I-It’s nothing. Just be safe... and keep your eyes on that girl, Tessia as well. You have to protect her if things get tough, okay?” Giving me a gentle smile, she reaches forward and pats my head, but her mind wasn’t completely there.

The house chef brought in my food at this time, which consisted of dry bread and a creamy soup that I assumed was used to dip my bread in. After Sylvie had a nibble on the bread, she whined and just curled up again. By the time I finished, the sun had just started peeking out from the mountains.

“Are you going to be coming home right after your dungeon excursion?” My father asked after giving me a hug.

“No, not right after. I will be back for a whole week though next week for break. There’s some kind special festival going on in this city, right?” My professors all announced it a couple weeks in advance that once every 10 years, there’s a phenomenon that occurs. Supposedly, during that entire week, the mana density in this Continent reaches its peak, giving mages the experience to make breakthroughs and even allowing non-mages to experience what it’s like to feel mana. For that week, classes are cancelled and students are allowed to either stay in campus or back home to meditate and train as much as possible.

“Ah, right! The Aurora Constellate is happening next week. So you’re going to stay here

for the festival too?" My mother's mood brightens up a bit

"Wow! A whole week?" My drowsy sister perks up at this and pulls on my sleeves.

"Yup, that's the plan! Let's all go to the festival together." Looking at my family, I give them a smile and hug my sister and mother before walking down the stairs and looking back.

"Be careful!" My mother shouts one last time while waving. Waving back at them, I get inside the carriage, copying Sylvie and catching up on my sleep until we arrive.



"Arthur!" Stepping out of the carriage, I see Curtis waving at me, his smile wide and genuine making me smile and wave back.

"How was your trip back home? Did you get to catch up with your family?" Claire pats me on the back when I reach the group of students waiting in the front gate.

"Good, you made it!" Professor Glory gives me a smile too as she begins counting heads. Looking around, besides Curtis and Claire, I see Clyde, Lucas, and a few other students that I never really pay attention to. I do one more quick check but I don't see Tess, and by the frantic look on his face, neither does Clyde.

"Sorry I'm late!" Running through the front gate, I see Tess catching her breath, her face a bit flushed and hair a bit messy.

"You're the last one, Princess Tessia. We can start heading out now." Professor Glory does one more quick check and nods to herself in satisfaction before turning around and leading the class of 10 students to the teleportation gate just a bit away.

I look back to see Tessia walking alongside Clyde when she catches my gaze. Giving me a shy smile of affirmation I give a small wave back but otherwise continue making small talk with Curtis and Claire.

After talking and confirming a few of things with the guard, he adjusts a couple of things on the gate before Professor Glory signals us to enter through the gate one by one, stepping in herself after all of us. Again, my stomach turns from the feeling of traveling through the gate. Luckily the trip never lasts more than a couple of seconds.

“Welcome! I assume for most of you that this is the first time you guys have stepped foot in the Beast Glades, correct?” Professor Glory harrumphs while placing her hands on her hips.

“Hmph. I’ve been here countless times. I was an A-class Adventurer after all.” Lucas steps forth with his chest out in pride.

With this, a couple impressed murmurs from the students made Lucas even more arrogant until Professor Glory chimed in.

“Ah yes. I’ve heard from Director Goodsky that you were indeed an Adventurer. I’ve also been notified that you had your license revoked due to classified reasons.” Raising an eyebrow, Professor Glory continues on.

“Tch. It’s all because of that fuckin’ masked bastard.” The professor doesn’t hear Lucas mutter under his breath as he leans against his staff.

“Right now, we’re near the edge of the Grand Mountains. If we walk a few hours this way, we’ll arrive at a famous pub of gathering called Dragonspine Inn. Back when I was an Adventurer, that was the place to chat and get information on various mana beasts and dungeons. We’ll be going to a rather low-level dungeon so don’t worry too much. I will also be with you at all times but I’ll refrain from helping unless it is absolutely necessary so don’t look to me for answers.” Professor Glory waves her right hand and from her dimension ring comes a small pile of black cloth.

“These are shawls that you guys will need to wear inside the dungeon. The dungeon we’re going inside is called Widow’s Crypt. It’s a fairly straightforward dungeon without any traps or mazes so don’t worry about getting lost. It is, however, very cold in there, which is why you need these shawls. The mana beasts you’ll mostly be facing are nasty little creatures called snarlers. There are two types of snarlers in this dungeon that you’ll need to be very wary of, the minion snarlers and the queen snarler. The minion snarlers are the ones you guys will be facing. Their queen burrows in the bottom floor of the dungeon so you won’t see it, but just know the difference. You’ll see what the minions look like once we go inside, but for now, we’re going to split you up into two teams of 5.” As Professor Glory finishes informing us, she takes out a small piece of paper from the inside of the shawl she was wearing.

“I’ve already decided on how teams will be split so take a step forward as I call you. Curtis, Claire, Dorothy, Owen, and Marge; you guys will make up the first team.” Our professor motions for them to pick up their shawls and step to the side.

“That leaves us with Arthur, Lucas, Clive, Tessia and Roland. Any questions?” She says as she points at the pile of shawls left.

I had to be in the same team as Lucas? Did she do this on purpose? No, there’s only 10 students in the class and she has no idea that I was an Adventurer before. Debating whether or not to ask to change with someone, I ultimately decide to stay after remembering what my mother said this morning. Even if she didn’t say it, I don’t trust Lucas being in the same team as Tess. I should be there just in case.

“No? Okay, then it’s settled. It shouldn’t take us more than two hours to reach the dungeon entrance so let’s hurry.” With that, we take off, taking long strides amidst the thick trees covering most of the sunlight.

We all traveled in silence, most of the students scared that they might attract unwanted attention from the mana beats that might be nearby. Soon, the trees cleared up as we began descending down a slope.

“We’re almost here. There’ll be a place to be on standby next to the dungeon so do not go inside.” With that, the professor stays in the back, doing a headcount again while each of us carefully slid down the steep slope leading to the dungeon entrance.

“Before we go in, are you sure you want to bring your bond inside the dungeon, Arthur?” Professor Glory gives me a concerned look.

‘What do you say? Do you want to go hunting since we’re at the Beast Glades anyway?’ I mentally transmit to Sylvie.

‘Ye~es!’ With that, Sylv hops off of my head and disappears off into the woods for the wrong reason that everybody else is thinking right now.

“Good choice, it’ll probably be safer if she stays out here and lays low.” Professor Glory gives me a nod before climbing up onto a rock so she could see everyone.

“Now. Split off into your groups and get to know each other. You guys have probably seen what everyone in your group is like from class but share your strengths and your weaknesses that need to be covered. You’ll also have to decide on a leader before we go inside.” As our professor takes a seat on the rock, our group came together and sat in a circle. While everyone looked at each other, not wanting to really speak up, the only one in our group that I didn’t really know, Roland, spoke up.

“Ahem! My name is Roland Alderman and I am a water attribute Augmenter! My hobbies are relaxing, shopping, going on dates with pretty girls and...”

“No one asked for your hobbies.” Clive interrupts while massaging the bridge of his nose in irritation.

“Well someone’s a little grumpy. Anywho... My strength is in mid-range fighting, using a water whip skill that is passed down from my family. My weakness is in close range. Next!” He finishes, tossing the imaginary baton to me, who was sitting to his left.

“Arthur Leywin. I’m a Wind and Earth attribute Augmenter. I’m capable at all ranges but prefer mid to close.” I state simply, looking directly at Lucas who was across from me.

“Clive Graves. Wind attribute Augmenter specializing in long distance fighting with a bow. I don’t really have a weakness.” He harrumphs.

“Lucas Wykes. I am a Conjurer with a single specialization in fire. As for strengths and weaknesses, let’s not bother going over that.” Rolling his eyes, he just leans back as he sat cross-legged.

Sensing the hostility in the air, I notice Tessia looking a little uncomfortable. “Tessia Eralith. I am a conjurer with a dual specialization in wood and wind. My strong suits are middle to close range fighting...” Letting her voice trail off, our group becomes silent, as we all know what the next topic will be.

“I elect myself to be the leader.” Lucas is the first one to speak.

“Oh? By what standards do you see yourself as the leader of this group?” I tilt my head, giving him an innocent look.

“By strength of course. Let’s be real... I can beat any of you guys in a fight. Isn’t it natural for the strongest one to be the leader?” Lucas gives me this face as if I asked the dumbest question he could think of, baffling me even further.

“I vote for Tessia! She’s the only girl and is pretty so I like that. We can even name our team the queen and Knights!” Roland has this sparkle in his eyes as his mind wanders off into his own little fantasy land.

“I also think that Princess Tessia should be the leader, ahem... not for the same reason

of course, not saying that she isn't pretty but I mean... Since she is the Student Council President." Clive ends up looking down as he mumbles, his cheeks a bit flushed.

"Wait I don't want to be the leader! How about Art... thur? Arthur Leywin." Shaking her hands in defense, Tess almost calls me by my nickname.

"I also think that Tessia should be the leader." I raise my hand up, everyone ignoring Tessia's comment. I don't mind just as long as Lucas isn't the one leading.

"Tch. Idiots." Lucas just rolls his eyes once more before we all get up.

"All right, since it seems like everyone is done, let's head in. Brace yourselves once we get inside, it's going to be chilly!" Professor Glory says before stepping inside the entrance, which appeared to be a narrow stairway going down into the darkness.

In a single file line, we all started making our way down the stairs and I swear the temperature dropped noticeably for each step we took down the stairs.

"W-w-w-what the hell? W-w-w-w-why is it s-s-s-so c-cold?" Roland mutters in between his teeth chattering.

"Augment yourself, you dolt." I hear Clive's voice from behind. It was really dark so I couldn't really see anything more than the vague outline of each person.

As we walked down the stairs, I felt something on my hand but before I pulled away, I realized what it was. Looking back, just a step behind me, I could see the vague outline of Tess' head. Even without seeing, I could tell she was already blushing by how warm her hand was. Accepting her hand and holding it tightly, we silently walked down the seemingly endless flight of stairs.

Even without augmenting myself, the once cold dungeon felt a lot warmer just for a bit as our class made our way down. I admit I was a bit disappointed that it started getting brighter as we kept making our way down because Tess pulled her hand back but once we reached the first floor of the dungeon, my inner warrior became excited at the scene in front of me.

The cavern stretched out for hundreds and hundreds of meters, making me wonder how it supported itself. The stone that made up the large cavern sparkled with a dim blue light as a thin layer of ice covered the floor and even formed icicles on the ceiling. Looking next to me, I realized that the reason that the almost transparent moss that

covered the cavern let off a soft glow, illuminating the entire area.

“That’s odd, usually, we’d see a fair amount of snarlers already. Why don’t I...”

“KRRRRRR”

“GRRRAWWWL”

“SNNNNNRRRR”

“GRAHK! GRAHK!”

All of a sudden, hideous noises started echoing all around us. Peeking out from behind the numerous boulders and from small caverns spotted around the walls of the cave were an uncountable amount of beady red eyes.

“Th-that’s a lot of snarlers...” I could hear Roland gulp as his eyes widened. It wasn’t just him but everyone in the class, even Curtis and Claire looked hesitant at what they were seeing. I looked at Professor Glory and from her expression; I don’t think she anticipated on seeing this many snarlers either.

Chapter 65

Widow's Crypt (2)

Even amongst mana beasts, snarlers were hideous creatures. With a thick grey fur coat, their 140cm bodies looked like muscular, mini gorillas. Their face, though, was a mix of a boar's snout and tusks with beady red eyes and long ears. With their thick powerful-looking lower jaw protruding outwards, you wouldn't think that they'd only be E stage mana beasts.

"GRRRRRRRRR"

"SSNNNNRRRRKKK"

"GRAAAHHK! GRAAAHHK!"

As dozens and dozens revealed themselves from hiding, the snarlers started snapping their jaw while letting out low growls.

"P-Professor... are there supposed to be this many S-S-S-snarlers?" One of upperclassman females in the other group stammered out.

"This is so odd. Even in the lower floors, there are never this many snarlers bunched together." Professor Glory braced herself and stayed firm. Because of the low morale in our class, if even our professor took a step back in hesitation, everyone would panic.

"There are a lot of them but they aren't impossible to handle. However, since this is just a class excursion, I think it's best to go back up, just in case. Safety is priority right now." Just as Professor Glory started slowly ushering everyone back towards the stairs, a fireball flew past her and exploded in a crowd of snarlers.

"BOOOM!" As the fireball exploded, six snarlers all shot out in different directions and lay motionless.

"See? These nasty little beasts are weak. Professor, don't tell me you brought us all here just to go back? Even a small fire spell was enough to kill six of them." Lucas scoffed as he lowered his staff.

I could tell Professor Glory was hesitant because of the unusual amount of snarlers

suddenly appearing in the first floor.

“I-I think we should try and train here, Professor.” Curtis has a determined look on his face as several other students, because of Lucas’ display, gained confidence as well.

The snarlers that have all come out seemed a bit frightened now, as they warily keep their distance, studying us with their unintelligent eyes.

“Okay, but if I feel that something isn’t right, we’re immediately out of here, understood?” With a stern voice, she waits for the class to agree to her condition.

“Good. Split into your two teams and take different parts of the floor. We don’t want any friendly fire happening in here. And Lucas, if you do something like that again, there will be consequences.” Professor Glory shot a menacing look towards the cocky blond, making him reluctantly comply.

“Prince Curtis, take your team and make your way towards the left side of the cave. Princess Tessia, take your team to the right of the cave and hold your ground. I’ll be keeping an eye on you guys at all times but stay vigilant and don’t underestimate the snarlers, especially in these numbers.” With that, Professor Glory motioned for the two teams to rush forward.

“Arthur, I want you to be the vanguard since you’re the best in close range. Clive and Roland, you guys take positions to his left and right behind him and make sure he’s covered. Lucas stay in the center between Arthur, Clive and Roland; I’ll cover your back. We’re going in the diamond position we learned in class!” As soon as we headed towards the miniature army of snarlers, Tessia’s shy self all but disappeared as her Student President side took over.

“GRRRAHHKK!!”

“KHHRRAAA! KRRAAH!”

“Oh fuck, fuck, fuck.” Roland, obviously intimidated by the fifty-odd snarlers all snapping their jaws at us, took out his weapon, which just looked like a handle of a sword.

Clive also took out his metal short bow from his dimension ring and he drew it back. Where the arrow should have been was a long metal needle wrapped in gusts of wind.

I take out Dawn’s Ballad as well, which was still wrapped in white cloth. I left it

sheathed and lowered myself, getting ready for a quick draw in case any of them suddenly jumped.

“Spread and destroy! Ember wisp!” As we approached the horde of snarlers, Lucas released one of his favorite spells and soon started floating around us.

“CRRAAHK!!” Reaching just 5 meters from the horde, I tucked my sword in tightly to my waist and prepared to draw as more than ten of them jumped towards us.

Dashing even faster, I leaned forward even lower and augmented the sword still inside its sheathe. Augmenting a wind to accumulate inside, I had to use all of my strength to keep my blade from coming out of its sheathe until the last minute. With the same theory as a loaded spring, I waited until I was just in front of the airborne snarlers before I released the pressurized blade.

“FWWAAAH! BOOM!” As the speed of my blade broke the sound barrier, I winced in pain as I felt my shoulder dislocating. That skill worked a lot better than I thought it would... I really shouldn’t experiment with skills in actual battles.

The front line of the snarlers both in the air and on the ground was either knocked back or cut in half but I couldn’t follow up with anything as my right arm dangled, dropping my sword.

“GRHHAAK!” Several more snarlers took the place of the fallen and galloped towards me, using all four limbs now.

“Fweeee~” Several arrows whizzed by me and promptly impaled some of the snarlers almost on me.

I look back and give Clive a nod before picking up my sword with my left hand. As I look to my left, Roland was wielding a whip made of water as he gripped the handle he brought out in the beginning. The water whip whirled erratically as some attacks missed the target by a large margin, making me think that Roland was still learning his family’s art.

The cave glowed in red and blue as different fire spells went off from both our side and the other team’s side. The snarlers were trying to surround us as they began spreading out and keeping their distance. The ember wisps that Lucas summoned were still shooting off small streams of fire but the snarlers were getting crafty, throwing chunks of ice from the ground at the wisps in hopes of extinguishing them.

“Arthur, are you okay?” Tess sees me clutching my arm as she’s fighting off two snarlers.

“Um... I think I’ll be fine.” I grit my teeth and position my right arm between my legs as I prepare to pop the shoulder back in.

“Gah!” I couldn’t help let out a cry as I forcibly reposition my arm back into its place.

The skill I haven’t even named yet worked a lot better than I thought, managing to kill over fifteen snarlers at once. Too bad my body wasn’t able to withstand the force just now.

The snarlers weren’t very strong, but after about thirty minutes the seemingly endless numbers that didn’t dwindle were taking its toll on us. Clive and Roland were sweating profusely while Tessia was a bit pale. Even Lucas’ spells were becoming a lot less flamboyant as he had to keep in mind the limit of his mana pool now.

“Is it just me or are there more snarlers now than there were in the beginning?” Roland shouts as he manages to kill three snarlers with the help of Clive.

“I think you’re right. The numbers aren’t adding up.” Clive responds as he looks at Tessia for further instructions.

Between the corpses on the floor and the ones still kicking, the numbers, just on our side added up to roughly over one hundred. That was more than double from the beginning.

“I think we should head back over to Professor Glory. We’re not going to be able to keep fighting like this for much longer.” Tess announces. As we make our way slowly back to where the entrance to the dungeon was, it seemed like the other team had the same idea.

Professor Glory noticed both our teams coming towards her so she made her way to us, cleaving snarlers left and right with her sword.

“Professor, I don’t think we can keep going like this. The snarlers keep coming!” Tess shouts over the waves of snarlers.

“Both teams! Follow your leaders! We’re going back up!” Without hesitation, Professor Glory motions for us to head back up the stairs when we hear a loud crash.

“BOOOM!”

The icicles and stalactites, along with other rubble from the roof of the cave came crashing to the ground as two figures came floating down, flapping their large wings to hold themselves steady.

“Are you kidding me? What are the queen snarlers doing on this floor?” Professor Glory didn’t bother holding in her rage as she took out another giant sword from her dimension ring.

“Class, make sure to not let any of the minion snarlers get in my way. I’ll handle the two queens. I don’t know what’s going on but I’m getting you guys out of here if it’s the last thing I do.” With a click of her tongue, she pulls off something around her neck and throws it on the ground. As the necklace shimmers and then turns grey, the mana fluctuating around Professor Glory changes.

She was using a seal!

“Prepare to back up Professor Glory! Don’t let any of the snarlers get past us!” Tessia commands as she holds her bladed staff out in front of her.

“Aye! Vanguard protect the Conjurers!” Curtis steps up, brandishing his sword and shield.

I take a step forward too, using gripping my sword with both hands to support my throbbing shoulder. There were 7 of us in the front as Lucas, Tessia and another girl started chanting spells. My eyes couldn’t help but focus on Professor Glory as she wielded two giant swords, one on each hand. Fire and what looked like sand were rapidly circling around her two swords as Professor Glory was chanting inaudibly.

The fire and sand began intertwining as the two queen snarlers, both a few times larger and nastier, with wings, began cautiously surrounding Professor Glory. The queen snarlers’ front two limbs had 4 long, sharp claws that glistened in a coating that I assumed might be poison.

“HAAHP!” Professor Glory, her two giant swords ablaze with fire and sand, charged towards the smaller queen snarler, beginning the battle.

I held back on using spells, choosing to simply hack and slash my way against the snarlers by augmenting my sword. Their thick coat offered them a little resistance against spells and attacks but it didn’t take much to kill them. What became more of a

problem was from the corpses of the snarlers. Their dead bodies began piling more and more around us, getting in the way of our attacks. Looking around, I was relieved to see that the vanguards were still holding up. Both Curtis and Claire had minor scratches and bruises, but they were in a much better shape compared to the other students.

I take a glance back and what I saw threw me by surprise. Professor Glory was pushing the queens, who were estimated to be on the upper spectrum of B-class bosses, back, by herself. What surprised me more was the way she did it. She was obviously a dual elemental Augmenter in earth and fire, but she was producing projectiles that looked like ice shards...

No... looking carefully, it wasn't ice. It was glass!

A small scratch on my arm brought my attention back to the fight in front of me but my mind couldn't ponder how Professor Glory was able to do that. I knew that superheating sand but in order to produce that amount of heat while still battling...

"KRRRAAAAAAHHHH!" The ear-deafening cry made us turn our heads back. Professor Glory just managed to land the finishing blow on the smaller queen. Our Professor wasn't in the best of shape, her armor scratched and dented in various places while blood trickled down her cheeks.

"All right!"

"NICE!!"

"Go Professor!"

The defeat of one of the queens dramatically boosted the moral of the class, as each of the students' renewed vigor allowed us to fight back harder against the snarlers that seemed to instantly generate spontaneously.

"GRRRRRAAAAAAHH!!!"

"BOOM!"

Upon seconds of hearing the loud crash, Professor Glory flew past the front line and landed hard against a wave of minion snarlers.

Allowing myself a few seconds to look back, a wave of nausea hits me as my eyes are glued onto the sight of the bigger queen snarler gorging on the corpse of the fallen

queen snarler.

Chapter 66

Widow's Crypt (3)

As the larger queen began devouring the smaller one, I couldn't help but become perplexed by what was happening in this dungeon. There were more than 10 floors in this dungeon, with minion snarlers inhabiting all but the 10th floor, where the queen snarler dwelled. The reason this dungeon was considered a beginner dungeon was because the queens never left the 10th floor, allowing for easy training up until the very last floor.

Although the queen snarler was a B-class mana beast, a large party of E-class Adventurers was still capable of defeating it.

Another question that popped into my mind... was it normal to have more than one queen in the dungeon? From what I read, queen species were very territorial, and immediately battled against any potential competitors to maintain control.

Professor Glory didn't really think much of it but I couldn't help be bothered by it. This brings me to my last inquiry... How are those two queens so much stronger than they normally should be?

I could understand Professor Glory having a hard time against two B-class mana beasts that are considered dungeon bosses, but she shouldn't be losing. The queen snarler that I read about was easily supposed to be disposed of by an A-class Adventurer.

"Ugh... why is that one so much stronger?" As Professor Glory got up, she had to cleave a couple of minions out of her way.

As I fended off waves of snarlers, my attention kept on drawing back to the queen snarler eating its former ally.

"Professor, does this usually happen?" I ask.

"Well I've heard that some species of mana beasts do indulge in cannibalism but I've never really seen this particular case. Why now of all times, I have no idea." Shaking

her head, she picks up her other sword on the ground and makes her way towards her opponent.

“GRRAAAH!” As the queen snarler finished consuming her fallen comrade, a bizarre change occurred. Its once grey fur turned jet black and the small horn on its forehead that I failed to notice at first grew substantially and curved upwards. The once beady red eyes turned sharp and menacing, almost psychotic as its mouth started foaming.

Professor Glory doesn’t say anything but I know that there was a growing sense of doubt on her mind. Until now, getting back home safely was considered just a matter of time, but even my body couldn’t help but shiver involuntarily from the murderous intent that exuded out of this beast.

“Cough... Professor! We can’t... cough... keep this up!” Tessia shouted amidst the growls and hisses of the enemy.

Tessia’s condition didn’t look too good and brought to my attention a rather obvious problem we were now facing.

“Everyone! No more fire spells! The entrance of the cave is blocked so our supply of oxygen is limited!” I roared out.

From the burnt pile of corpses accumulating, the air was becoming thick as some of the weaker students began coughing uncontrollably.

The queen and Professor Glory were in a stalemate, with our Professor on the losing side. As I focused on the main battle, I could see that the fighting style of the queen snarler completely changed. There was no trace of hesitation or sense of self-preservation. Each attack it lashed out at Professor Glory was with the intent to kill without caring for its own body. Usually that should’ve been its downfall, but that unique queen snarler’s black fur was able to absorb most of the damage from our professor’s attacks.

“Cough... Arthur... I think... my mana core is beginning to cough... act up.” Tess, who was a few meters behind me, fell to her knees as she began clutching her abdomen.

Fuck.

‘Papa! What’s wrong? Are you okay?’ Sylvie’s voice pops in my head.

‘We ran into a problem, get here as fast as you can and head down the stairs.’ I respond before focusing my mind on what’s happening here.

Several factors began weighing down on my mind now and I began to get a sense of nostalgia from my trip to the Dire Tombs. Did I have the power to clear the mountain of rubble blocking the front entrance to the stairs and even if I did, should I just take Tess and escape by ourselves?

No. Tess would never forgive me if she knew that I left everyone else in here to escape.

Then after making a way back up, do I stay behind and help Professor Glory kill the mutated queen snarler?

Whatever decision I choose to make, the first thing I had to do was clear this rubble. It was important that I clear a path back up in one try; since it was obvious the queen wasn’t going to let us all escape.

“Professor, keep the queen busy. I’ll try to open a way out of here for us!” Professor Glory had to work even harder to keep up with the queen since she couldn’t use any fire techniques. After giving me a nod in affirmation, I get to work. Tessia wasn’t in any state to help and everyone else was too busy fending off the army of minion snarlers. Lucas had to resort to using heat spells to try and deter the snarlers since oxygen levels were becoming more and more scarce.

I would have to do this by myself. I had to calculate this well. If I were to use a large enough fire spell in this state right now and fail, we were all going to begin suffocating in here. Water? Ice? There were too little water elemental mana particles in this cave to release anything strong enough to drill a hole through the mountain of rock. The once ice-filled cave was now dry and arid with a thick layer of smoke being produced from some of the burnt snarler corpses.

That left me with wind and earth, or a mixture of both, but even with the level I am right now, I wasn’t confident in being able to produce a powerful enough attack. I thought of maybe using phase two, but with Tess in the condition she was in right now, I had to stay conscious at least until we get out of this dungeon.

Was there really no other option? As my mind began spinning for possible solutions, I see Professor Glory receive a pretty large blow to her right arm.

‘I’m almost there Papa! Hold on!’ Sylvie’s voice gives me an idea.

That's it!

"Curtis! I need your help right now!" I roar across the battlefield.

"Arthur, I don't think I can afford to..."

"Come, NOW!" I bark back before he can refute.

Curtis was a bloody, grimy mess, but from the shallow wounds on his body, it was obvious that the blood on him wasn't his.

"What is it?" He pants heavily. I could tell he was exhausted by the wear on his face and body. His shield was badly dented and his sword looked dull from the repeated use.

"Do you think your beast will ability, World Howl, is strong enough to clear the rubble?" I turn his head to snap him back into attention.

"Arthur, I don't think I have the mana to even be able to go into my first phase." He shakes his head hopelessly.

"Just answer the question. Is it strong enough?"

"Y-yeah, if I had enough mana, I could potentially produce a blast bigger than the one on the mock team battle where you, um, got injured." He scratches his head, confused by where I was going with this.

I thought about maybe directing the blast at the queen snarler but even if it were strong enough to maybe kill it, it would be impossible to accurately get only the queen and not Professor Glory. It was safer to just go with this plan.

"Okay. I want you to not question what I'm about to do and just focus on going into your first phase and producing the blast strong enough to clear that mountain of rubble. Got it?" The amount of urgency and authority must have gotten through to Curtis because he just nods and turns around.

Taking off my seal and putting it in my dimension ring, I make sure to control the amount fluctuation in the mana as to not tip anyone off. Everyone is occupied with the snarlers but if I don't control the mana release like Professor Glory did after she released her seal, I would draw attention from the queen snarler.

Feeling the untapped pool of mana that I now had access to, I place both my hands on Curtis' back.

From the amount of mana I will into Curtis, the Prince involuntarily drops to one knee before he's able to adjust his body to the sudden bombardment of mana.

Mana transference has been studied for many years according to professors and many of the books in the library, but it was a hopeless cause for them. They believed that if a mage was fire attribute, receiving mana from another fire attribute mage should be possible, but after countless tests and failures, they deemed it as implausible; the reason being that even if someone is a specialization, the mana inside their bodies aren't purely of only that element. Hypothetically, if someone was able to condense and refine their core to highest sense, then with another one of someone of that same level and element, they could transfer mana to each other. Other than that, it would be impossible, except for me.

The fact that I'm able to manipulate all four elements allows me to adjust and mimic and input the types of mana and the ratio of each element of the person I'm transferring it to. It was sort of like what I did for my sister and Lilia when teaching them mana manipulation in their body but on a much bigger scale. Of course I haven't perfectly mastered this so I'll be wasting a lot of mana, but this was probably our best bet.

As I began slowly controlling and limiting the amount of each elemental mana particles I transmit to Curtis, I can't help but grit my teeth in self-deprecation at the turn of events.

There were so many small signs that I chose to ignore, thinking that it would work out fine, and that I could handle it. Was I treating this life I had right now for granted? Being fortunate enough to have this amount of power at my age has definitely made me lose my past sense of rationality to a degree.

No longer a king, tied down by rules and politics as well as not being tied down by my own physical capabilities, I've become careless. In this world, the limits to my potential were boundless. Reaching the White stage or even further wasn't a dream but a matter of time and effort.

The thing that appalled me the most and what I hated to admit was that, I was, in a sense, a bit like Lucas. I was nowhere near as much of a jerk as him and I had people I

actually cared for beside myself, but I was becoming arrogant, like Lucas, arrogant to the extent of carelessness.

“I-I don’t know what you just did, Arthur but I feel great. I think I’ll be able to go into my first phase!” The Prince says, bringing me back to reality. I sense the change his body is going through internally sense I’m the one transferring my mana to him.

“king’s Wrath.” Curtis let’s out a growl as his body begins to change.

CRACKLE

I jerk my hands back in pain as Curtis releases his first phase of his Beast Will. Confused, I try transferring mana to him again but the rejection from his body is even stronger than the first time.

Did the mana from his beast will reject my mana?

Before I had the chance to try again, Curtis began gathering mana for his World Howl technique.

He crouches, lowering his center of gravity to withstand the recoil of World Howl, the mana from both his body and the atmosphere gathered in front of his open jaw.

During this time, I rush to where Tessia was curled behind the front line and scooped her up. Getting Tessia out of here would be priority. I was partly to blame for this mess. I should’ve done a better job to prevent something like this from happening in the first place.

“WORLD HOWL!” Curtis unleashes his powerful breath attack, but the mutated queen must’ve sensed that something was wrong because it immediately changed its target from the wounded Professor Glory to Curtis.

“Oh no you don’t!” Bellowing at the top of her lungs, Professor Glory leaped up and grappled the mutated queen in flight in hopes to deter it from reaching Curtis.

“BOOOM!”

As planned, my mana transference paid off as Curtis’ trump card blasted a large hole through the rubble, clearing a path to the now visible stairway entrance back to the surface.

“EVERYONE! HEAD FOR THE STAIRS!” I roar through the sound of rocks falling and snarlers growling.

“GO! NOW!” Professor Glory shouts too as she struggles to hold her own against the queen snarler.

The exhausted class makes one final push towards the entrance as Professor Glory holds the queen at bay while the wall of snarler corpses keeps the ones alive at bay for the brief moment.

“Claire, I’m trusting Tess to you.” I hand Tessia over to Claire, who seemed to be in the best shape right now.

“You’re not planning on staying, are you? You can’t be serious. As your commanding leader in the Disciplinary Committee I forbid...”

“Just go...” With the limited amount of time that we had, I release a sharp killing intent to get my point across, making her flinch backwards in surprise.

Helping the drained Curtis back to his feet, I push both of my Disciplinary Committee teammates towards the front entrance of the cave before turning back to where Professor Glory was fighting.

“Why the hell did you come back, Arthur.” I could almost feel the amount of frustration in my professor’s voice as she snapped at me through gritted teeth.

“We’re going to need both of us to kill this thing.” Taking Dawn’s Ballad back out from my dimension ring, I unsheathe it.

“You better hope this thing kills me because you’re going to be regretting not following my orders.” She responds, blocking a blow from the queen’s sharp claws.

“Hey, I’m a professor too, remember?” I give her a weary smile before making a sharp swing with my blade.

“You’re too smart for your own good, Arthur.” She smiles back while shaking her head. The situation didn’t seem too good as the mana transference made me use most of my mana. If it weren’t for mana rotation, I probably would’ve gotten backlash already.

While battling the queen and keeping her busy enough so the rest of the class could

get out safely, I notice that the last one is Lucas. Our eyes lock in for a brief moment before he turns back his head and disappears into the entrance.

I could've sworn I saw him snort before he turned away.

"GRAAAH!" As the fight continued, I managed to sever one of the queen's wings so it wasn't capable of flight any longer, but its thick fur was preventing us from doing anything more than giving it shallow wounds. This mutated queen, which was almost 3 meters tall on its hind legs, was filled with wounds from both Professor Glory and I, but it didn't seem to bother it at all.

"I don't think we can kill this thing." I shout to Professor Glory, who was on the other side of the queen snarler.

"We'll need to at least bind it somehow so we can escape. I don't think the queen will follow us out of the dungeon!" She responds as the queen howls in anger.

"I need you to keep it busy for 5 seconds, professor." I reposition myself so Professor Glory was in my view.

"Okay." She doesn't question what I'm about to do as she unleashes another burst mana out of her core.

As Professor Glory leaps towards the mutated queen, I put my sheath back into my dimension ring and grasp my sword with both hands. With the seal gone, I use the last of my mana to will lightning into Dawn's Ballad.

"HAAAA!" Without mana strengthening my body, my dash towards the queen snarler feels like a crawl.

"Move!" At my signal, Professor Glory dashes out of the way as I stab my sword into an already existing wound that I managed to inflict just earlier between its shoulder blades.

CRACKLE *CRACKLE*

"KRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!!!" The sudden shock seemed to be effective against the queen as it began to spasm.

"LET'S GO!" Without even being able to pull my sword back out from the queen snarler,

Professor Glory grabs me by my waist and carries me towards the front entrance.

As the hordes of minions got in our way, Professor Glory cleaved our way through until we reached the front entrance.

“GRAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

“H-HOW?” Professor Glory could only gasp as both of us looked up. The queen, with my sword still embedded in its spine, somehow recovered enough to make one desperate leap to keep us from escaping.

“Hurry!” I was currently dangling on top of my professor’s shoulder as I tried to snap her out of her shock. With the mutated queen snarler almost upon us we just managed to avoid her sharp claws before she landed hard on the ground.

Without the luxury to even look back, we made our way past the minions and into the hall when I see the mutated queen crawling her way towards us. I guess my last attack did some damage because it wasn’t freely mobile as it awkwardly limped towards us, using its claws to drag its body.

Reaching the end of the hall where the stairs began to ascend, I noticed something odd about the queen snarler that was just a couple meters away from us.

Well... every bit of that mutated queen was odd, but this was different. As it reached closer and closer to the beginning of the staircase where we were, its face and body began pulsating. Tumors began growing sporadically in random parts of its body and face.

Don’t tell me...

“BOOM!”

Before Professor Glory could even turn around, the force of the explosion pushed her forward while she lost her grasp of me, who was still on her shoulder.

As if that wasn’t bad enough, the explosion caused by the queen opened up a large hole.

“ARTHUR!” Through gritted teeth, I heard my professor’s desperate cry as she reached her hand out for me, but it was too late.

“Save Tess!” I call back out weakly before using my last bit of mana I’ve been gathering for the short amount of time to augment my body.

Chapter 67

Widow's Crypt (4)

After what seemed like hours of falling while being knocked between various rocks that also fell down along with me from the explosion, the speed at which I'm dropping down keeps me from stabilizing myself. I spread my arms and legs, desperately trying to find anything to grab onto to stop myself before I become a splatter mark on the ground where I land. Fortunately, my right hand catches onto a jutting tree root. Unfortunately, that was the arm that was dislocated not too long ago so the sudden jolt sends a sharp pain that makes me want to bite through my lower lip.

Dangling with my right arm that feels like it's about to rip off, I send Sylvie a mental transmission.

'Sylv. Are you there? I fell quite a bit down but I'm still okay. Do you sense where I am?'

"..."

There's no response. I can't even sense my bond. I immediately start worrying if something happened to her, but with the queen snarler dead and the rest trapped inside the dungeon, I don't think that was the case. It was more likely that I was either too deep down, which I doubt, or that something in this area is warded off and sealed from the outside, or more accurately the surface.

By the extent of how much I fell down, I doubt I was on any of the immediate floors below it. Did the explosion unveil a hidden passage to some room somewhere inside the dungeon?

Speaking about explosions, the explosion caused by the mutated queen snarler was odd. The blast was big, but I got the feeling that the explosion wasn't meant to kill whoever was near it. If that were the case, my body, along with Professor Glory's, would be in a much worse state than it is now.

"Ugh..." As I continue dangling on my injured arm, I feel myself losing grip. I let out a couple quick breaths to ready myself before I pull myself up with right arm up enough so my left arm could take its place.

“Ergghh!” Through gritted teeth, I resist the temptation to just let go and leave it up to God or the gods or any gods, whatever they worshiped in this world, if any.

As I now hang on my left arm, I test to make sure my right arm isn’t dislocated again. Thankfully, it still seems to be in its right place.

After a quick assessment of my body’s condition, I look around, except all I see is darkness. It wasn’t as simple as it simply being dark; it was pitch black. That feeling of when you shut your eyes so hard that it seems like different lights are oozing around in your vision or that feeling where no matter how hard you squint, your eyes can’t adjust. That was what I was feeling right now.

As I activate my mana rotation, I disperse the mana I have covering my body to only my left arm holding onto the branch. I have to use this “break time” to gather as much mana I can. Augmenting the little bit of mana I have into my eyes as well in hopes of being able to see something, I can only let out a sigh in defeat.

‘I’m not blind... am I?’ I can’t help but think to myself as I augment my eyes again.

Just to comfort my needless worry, I break one of the most basic rules in situations like this. I produce a small fire on the tip of my right index finger.

Looking at the warm red and orange flicker of fire on my fingertip I breathe in relief before extinguishing the flame.

While vision is an important thing, the last thing you want to do in a dark place like this is draw attention to yourself. Now that the enemies here, if any, know of my location, I needed to move.

Since I couldn’t see, I use wind to sense the type of space I was in right now. I had no idea how narrow or wide this hole that I was in was, but I assumed it wasn’t too wide since I hit quite a few objects along the way while falling.

Sending out short, soft bursts of wind, equidistant, around me, I figure out that this ditch, for a lack of better words, had a diameter of about 10 meters. The scary part, however, was that I couldn’t even sense how far down I was and how much further I had to go down until I had a floor to walk on.

What I had to decide now was whether to try and climb back up or make my way down. By how much I fell and all of the other debris that fell down along with me,

chances were that the opening at the top would already be covered. With Sylvie not answering from outside, I had no way of knowing if she could open up an exit for me.

That only leaves me with going down.

Sigh

No matter how rational and levelheaded I was, I couldn't help but feel a bit anxious in this situation. More so than immediate dangers in front of me, a situation like this, where I couldn't see anything or even sense any life forms made me more edgy. In the case where the army of snarlers was in front of us, I knew what I had to do and I could think of how to deal with it. Right now, I could neither imagine nor predict what might happen in the next couple of seconds, making me all the more tense.

Augmenting both my hands with earth attribute mana, I'm able to bury my hand into the side of the giant abyss-like hole, creating a handhold for myself. I position myself flat against the side with both my hands dug into the wall to keep myself from falling.

In a steady motion, I pull my augmented hands out of the side of the wall and allow myself to fall before I claw my hands into the wall again to stop. The amount of stress it put on my arms made me cringe every time but this would be the fastest way to make my way down.

Gripping, letting go, gripping, letting go, gripping, letting go. I had to keep my body flat so I don't start falling away from the wall. I also couldn't wait too long before I had to grip the wall again because it would be a lot more dangerous to try and slow down after picking up too much speed.

I let out pulses of wind every now and then to try and see how much farther I had to go down. Even after around 3 hours of gripping and letting go, according to my internal clock, I have yet to sense a floor anywhere close beneath me.

'How long is this fucking hole.' Without even the luxury to vent my frustration aloud, I was left to rant inside my head using words I think even the most vulgar of adults would find inappropriate.

I know everyone warns Adventurers about the dangers and unpredictability of dungeons but both the Dire Tombs and even this supposedly low level dungeon has proven to cause me more trouble than the times I adventured with Jasmine without the use of magic.

I mean, what are the chances that the time when I'm supposed to go into the D class dungeon filled with E class monsters, a freaking army decides to welcome us on the first floor.

The minion snarlers weren't even that bad, to be honest. We were stupid for using so much fire magic when we had no ventilation but I was handling most of them without even using mana.

That Mutated queen was the problem. How the hell was she so strong? Was it because she ate the other queen? Is it even possible to just get power ups like that?

As I continued debriefing to myself the events that occurred earlier, I kept gripping and letting go of the stone wall, falling down further into who knows where I was now.

As I let go of the wall and fell down, I timed myself before burying my augmented hands into the wall again. However, unlike before, my hand wouldn't go inside.

"What the..."

I desperately tried clawing at the wall but even with the augmentation in my hand, I wasn't able to make even a scratch into the wall.

The surface of the wall was different now. It was smooth; too smooth for it to be natural.

I was picking up speed as I persistently tried to bury my fingers into the wall, hopelessly.

'This isn't working.'

Careful to let out as little noise as possible while I continued falling, I rhythmically let out pulses of wind around me, as a sort of makeshift echolocation. Through sending out faint pulses and measuring how long it took before it hit a surface, I could locate, in my head, potential footholds and handholds to make my way down.

Easier said than done. The theory worked great in my head but trying it without practice proved to be harder than I imagined it to be. There were few handholds I could try and hang myself from but my makeshift echolocation technique wasn't as accurate as I wished it would be.

I ended up missing a lot of the potential supports and it just became harder as I picked

up speed.

Fortunately, I still didn't sense the floor anywhere close to me so I had time, but if I fell down any faster, even if I could grab onto a support, I wasn't sure if my arms would be able to take the stress from stopping suddenly.

As I continue fumbling my arms against the wall to search for anything that may slow down or stop my fall, I'm able to finally sense the ground.

Fuck... This isn't good.

I had about 200 meters before my body becomes a puddle on the ground. That left me with about... 6 seconds?

Fuck.

Turning around so that the wall was to my back, I gather all of the mana I saved up 'til now. It would take about 4 seconds to focus enough mana into the spell.

'Wind Bullet.' Stretching my arms out in front of me, I unleash a barrage of fist-sized bullets of compressed air to the other side of this giant hole I was in.

If I could create enough force to push myself back against the wall, I would be able to slow down enough to survive the fall.

BOOM *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM*
BOOM *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM* *BOOM*

As the air bullets collided into the wall about 10 meters away from me, my body began pressing harder and harder against the wall behind me from the recoil of the spell. I couldn't do anything besides grit my teeth as I felt the back of my uniform and my skin burning off due to the friction.

I could feel myself approaching the backlash stage but I just desperately let out all of the mana I could muster up while using mana rotation. As the air bullets continued colliding against the other side, pushing me back harder and harder into the smooth wall, I approached the ground.

50 meters...

40 meters...

20 meters...

I see a faint light!

10 meters...

5 meters...

“AAHH!!” I feel myself slowing down as the burning pain coursing through my back becomes numb.

2 meters before I reached the ground. I let out one last, large pulse of compressed air straight below me.

CRASH

“!!!!”

Cough

My eyes bulge and the only sound I can make is a painful cough as the jolt shoots straight up my body.

I roll forward as soon as I can try and spread out the pressure as much as possible but it wasn't enough.

As I feel my head spinning, I struggle to stay conscious, my vision blurring.

My vision!

As I lift my head up from the ground, faint lights illuminate the area, allowing my blurring vision to get a sense of where I was. I seemed to be in a passageway of some sort, with small lights along the sides. Further down the hall came a brighter source of light.

“Wh-who's there?” A female voice echoes.

Cough

I try answering the frightened voice but again, my voice fails me.

“Please... I need help.”

Again, nothing comes out as my vision continues to fade in and out. I try getting up but utterly fail.

“.....hold..... on.” My voice comes out raspy and weak but she hears me.

I hear harsh, forced breaths from her before she replies with a weak “okay”.

Sylvia’s dragon will assimilated into my body worked wonders as I felt myself healing. My back was scorching from sliding down the wall and my legs feel like they’ve been torn apart and taped back together, but I’m able to stand up within thirty minutes.

Looking around to where I landed, I can’t help but shake my head at the complete darkness that loomed above me from where I came from. Around me were shattered stones and, I think, a limb of the queen snarler that exploded. Near the limb though, my eyes notice a reflection coming from under a pile of rubble.

Making my way there slowly, a smile creeps up on my face as I realize what it was. My sword! Good old Dawn’s Ballad, was soon retrieved and safely back inside my dimension ring after digging it up and pulling it out of the shallow pile of rocks on top of it. I put the torn limb of the Mutated queen snarler inside my dimension ring as well, hoping to study it if I ever made it back up.

Thinking optimistically, I realized I wasn’t in too bad of a shape. I managed to slow myself down enough so I didn’t have any broken bones. The shock went through the spine and rattled my brain, making me almost lose consciousness but considering the circumstances, I feel like it could’ve been a lot worse. My mana was now beginning to recover and with my legs functioning, I made my way to the voice that seemed to have gone silent.

“Hello?” I walk through the passageway, using the wall as support.

“I’m... here.” The voice seemed even weaker than it was half an hour ago.

Making my way towards the growing light at the end of the hall, I call out to her again.

As I reach the end of the tunnel, my vision takes a few seconds to adjust from the

change in brightness after being accustomed to utter darkness for so long.

“This... cough... way.”

“...”

Before I could respond, I almost fall back as I stumble in horror from what I witness.

The warzone created by the hundreds of snarler bodies scattered and piled on top of each other seemed like it was from a children’s picture book compared to the scene that I can’t seem to peel my eyes away from.

Corpses. Corpses of humans, elves, and dwarves lay dead and some in pieces around the cavern that would’ve been considered beautiful.

The once green grass-like moss spread over the ground were dyed red while the stream crossing through the cavern had floating bodies with blood spreading around them.

There were around forty-fifty corpses, spread out in the cavern with their weapons next to them. The damage done to their bodies’ revealed torture as some had their limbs torn apart and others had cuts all over their bodies before being beheaded.

Cough “Are you... still there?” The weak voice came from my left.

“I can’t see... oh...” My heart drops and I can’t even finish what I say.

The woman that was lying against the wall of the cavern was probably in a worse state than the carcasses spread around, split apart.

The woman, elf, it seems, had most of her limbs torn off. Out of the holes where her right arm and both legs should’ve been were holes, cruelly sealed by burning the wound. Her eyes were gone as dried blood that streamed down from where her eyes were stained her cheeks. In the woman’s abdomen, right where her mana core was, a sleek black spike was impaled through her and once again, sealed.

“You... How?” I drop to my knees in front of her as I inspect her. Looking at her carefully, I feel like I’ve seen her somewhere. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it but I recognize her face. Where did I...

The Six Lances... The Six Lances! She was one of the six strongest mages in all of Dicathen, chosen to represent the Continent.

“You’re one of the Six Lances!” I can’t help but sputter out.

“Indeed I am...” She lets out a ragged sigh.

“As for how... If you’re asking me how I’m still alive in this state, it’s because he left me alive.” Her eyebrows furrow and the dried blood crusted in between her eyelids crumble, letting out a faint stream of fresh blood from where her eyes once were.

“He?” I feel like I’m asking stupid questions but I was so lost.

“Yes, he. He calls himself Vritra.” With her left hand, the only limb she had left, she slowly reached for something behind her and pulled it out.

Inside her hand was a sleek black stone fragment of some sort. As I squinted my eyes and analyzed it, I was suddenly reminded of my time with Sylvia.

As the memory clicked and the pieces were put together in my head, my hand squeezed tightly around the black shard as my whole body shook from anger.

I remember why this black stone looked so familiar.

It was part of the horn of one of the black-horned demon that Sylvia first disguised herself as and also the very species that killed her.

Chapter 68

Widow's Crypt (5)

"Can I keep this?" I realize my palm is bleeding from grasping the shard of the horn too hard.

"Pft!" The elven woman, despite her condition, let out a hearty laugh after my question, catching me by surprise. Raising an eyebrow while tilting my head, I couldn't help but wonder what's going through her mind and admire her ability to still be able to laugh considering the situation she was facing.

"You're probably looking at me as if I've gone insane, right?" Her face isn't turned directly towards me but she seems to know where I am.

"...I wouldn't exactly say insane." That was the only thing I could mumble out after she seemingly read my mind.

"You're a weird one too, asking a dying soldier if you can keep something like that. Keep it. It won't hold any value to me anyway." She lets out a sigh and suddenly, her face looks like it's aged 20 years from the expression she puts on.

"I don't even know your name, kid, but I'm going to die soon. There's no need to try and be sensitive about that fact." The elven warrior, putting on a serious face, faces me directly when she states this.

"My name is Arthur, and yes, unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any way for me to save you. I'm sorry." I put the black shard inside my dimension ring.

"Sigh... I guess it just wasn't meant to be then. Since I don't have a lot of time, I'll tell you as much as I know." My chest felt heavy when she so easily cast aside her hopes and accepted her fate.

"My name is Alea Triscan, as you figured out, I am one of the members of the 6 lances and those were my troops. Each Lance is in charge of a battalion composed of some of the top mages." She lets out another heavy sigh, and for once, I'm glad she isn't able to witness the gruesome slaughter scene that turned this once beautiful place into a

grave of mangled corpses

“After the commencement of the 6 lances a few of months ago, we have been training to work as a team to clear dungeons and other unknown areas. The 6 Lances rarely go on missions together, unless we are to explore an S class dungeon or above.” She continues after catching her breath.

“From the direction of your footsteps earlier, it seems you came in from a different entrance. This place is actually connected to three dungeons. Which dungeon did you come from, Arthur?” Alea struggles to prop herself up more comfortably against the wall.

“I came, with my classmates and Professor, from the Widow’s Crypt. Everyone else was able to make it back out, but I guess I wasn’t so lucky.” I take a seat against the wall next to Alea as I study the carnage displayed before me. I’m able to vaguely imagine what happened by how the bodies are positioned and where they got injured.

“It’s probably really gruesome isn’t it? I’m not sure how old you are Arthur, but no one should have to see something like this.” Alea chimes in after a moment of silence.

“My age probably won’t correlate too well in regards to situations like this, but you are right. No one, regardless of age, should have to see something like this.” I can’t help but let out a sigh as well.

“...”

“My troops and I came from an A class dungeon named Hell’s Jaw. We were assigned to investigate the dungeon after getting reports of inconsistent sightings inside. The Adventurers that came back alive were ones who frequented the dungeon for training. The ones that made it back were barely alive and they all spoke about how the beasts residing within suddenly became stronger and fiercer. Was that the case for the dungeon you came from as well?” I notice Alea beginning to talk a bit slower.

“Yeah. Just on the first floor, an army of minion snarlers welcomed us. The minions weren’t bad but two queen snarlers showed up. One of the queens, after eating the other queen, turned black and its strength jumped a few fold. I suspected this was the cause.”

“What do you mean you suspected?! Are you saying you’ve seen that demon before?” Alea suddenly straightens up and looks towards my directions, surprise evident in her

voice.

“I’m not sure if it’s the same one, but yes.” I respond frankly.

“The same one? You think there’s more than one?” Alea’s already pale face drains to an even whiter color as she asks me this.

“I don’t have definite proof, but I suspect that the one you saw, Vritra, is just one of the horned demons out there somewhere.” I reply as I can still recall that night where I got separated from Sylvia. The black demon with its horns curving downwards said something about causing them trouble. It was just a speculation, but I suspected that there were probably more of them.

My mind begins to spin as I think of all the different possibilities and reasons as to why they’re doing this. Is this all for Sylvie?

I remember when Sylvia gave the stone to me that I had to protect it all costs. That “stone” turned out to be an egg, and of a dragon no less. Was Sylvie such an important existence that the horned demons would go this far for?

“What... are you thinking of, Arthur?” Alea lets out a strained cough as some fresh blood escapes from the sealed wound where her mana core once was.

I always found it intriguing that, while beast cores were capable of being harvested and used as tools to enhance mana, human mana cores weren’t. When a mage dies, their mana core shatters and the mana accumulated inside disperses. Was it because we gathered mana from the atmosphere that this happens?

There seemed to be a deeper meaning when I think of how humans don’t need their mana cores in order to survive, while our mana cores are dependent on us being alive. This world seems to revolve around whether you are a mage or not, and if you are, how strong are you. I feel like the God of this world wants to tell us that life is more important than magic, which should be an obvious statement, but a statement which we seemed to have forgotten.

Before I lose myself deeper into the aspect of a higher being, Alea’s ragged breathing snaps me back to reality.

“Are you okay?” That was a dumb question. Of course she’s not okay.

“When my team reached the first floor of Hell’s Jaw, there was nothing off about it; the mana beasts were the same ones that were recorded. It was when we reached the final floor where the master of the dungeon made its den. The Hades Serpent, which was an AA class mana beast, should be something I can beat fairly easily myself.” There was no trace of boasting or overconfidence in her tone. It was just a fact for her.

“The Hades Serpent, which was known for the blue fire spouting along its spine, looked different. At first, we were confused because it didn’t look like it had any flames at all, but when we looked closer, the reason we couldn’t see the flames against the black walls of the cave was because the flames themselves were black.

It looked like thick smoke flickering wildly along the spine of the 30-meter serpent. That particular Hades Serpent, also had a black horn jutting out of its forehead while its scales, which were recorded as being a matte grey color, were sleek black...” Taking a deep breath, I notice Alea shivering.

“The fight was gruesome. I lost 5 of my men to that Hades Serpent. The fight took several hours but I was able to kill it. When we tried to retrieve the beast core though, it wasn’t there.” Breaking into another fit of coughs, I run towards the pond and soak what’s left of my uniform inside. After rinsing it, I allow the fabric to absorb as much water as it can before walking over to where Alea was.

“Open your mouth.” I instruct.

She hesitates for a moment but opens her mouth. As I gently squeeze my soaked uniform over her mouth, the water flows out and into her mouth.

“Ah.” She lets out a small yelp before fiercely swallowing water that probably isn’t the most sanitary. She whispers a small thank you before continuing on with her story.

“Although we were tempted to go back to the surface, we didn’t manage figure anything out thus far, so we started searching for clues inside. One of my men used a spell and found that there was a hidden tunnel underneath a thin layer of earth. After crossing the tunnel, we arrived here...” As Alea’s voice trembled at her last words, tears mixed with blood streamed down the closed eyelids where her eyes used to be.

“H-He was here... when we reached this cavern. I still remember the way he looked at us. Those scarlet eyes...” After letting out a trembling breath, she continues.

“My team and I... no one knew what that monster was so we did what our instincts

told us to do. We raised our weapons... that was our first mistake. I can still picture it so clearly. His pale gray skin. His face... it was beastly yet, it looked almost... human. He looked at us and smirked, exposing his sharp fangs. What threw us off was when he talked..." She whispers now, her voice getting weaker.

"Mm." I respond, just so she knows I'm still there.

"He wasn't even surprised to see us there. Vritra, he... that thing, just looked at us before..."

"Before?" I sit upright as her last statement catches my attention.

"...He gave us two options." Tears and blood streamed down her once beautiful face again as she willed herself to finish what she was about to say.

"H-He looked straight at me, as if he knew instantly that I was the leader, and told me that he'd let me walk out unharmed if I..."

"..."

"...He laughed, telling me how he wanted to watch me dismember each of my teammates, one by one, in front of him." Alea was shaking in anger as her only hand was clenched firmly into a fist.

That ridiculous proposition would've infuriated anyone but looking at the state Alea was in right now, I don't have the confidence to say she made the right decision. Maybe her teammates would've wanted her to kill them quickly instead of being tortured the way they were.

"What was his other choice?" I ask as I gently wrap my hands over her clenched fist.

"He just... scoffed at us and said '...or you can try and fight'". Her blood mixed tears stained the torn remains of her clothes as she continued to softly cry.

Unable to find the words to adequately comfort her, I just kept my hands wrapped tightly around her clenched fist.

"..."

Moments trickled by with only the sound of running water and Alea's silent sobs

breaking the deathly silence.

Hic

“We didn’t... stand a chance.”

Hic

“I hate to make you relive the scene, but I need as much of the details as possible, Alea.”
I gently stroke her hand to try and calm her.

“He had *Hic* one horn in the middle of his forehead... that curved backwards sharply.”
She tried her best to talk calmly.

“One horn?” So there really was more than one horned demon! Was it a clan? A race?

My heart starts beating uncontrollably from just imagining a whole race composed of horned demons; just one of them could wipe out one of the 6 Lances and her team.

“Y-yes. My strongest single point attack only managed to create a small chip in that horn.” Alea seemed like she wanted to ask me something but she continued on, her breath getting shorter.

“He... It... Vritra was able to use magic, magic that seemed to defy the common sense of any magic I’ve ever seen.” Alea’s lips begin to quiver.

“What kind of magic did he use?”

“Metal. Black metal. He was able to instantaneously conjure metal spikes, blades, any sort of weapons from the ground and himself. I don’t even know how to describe it properly. It was over too quickly. Half of my team was dead in the first wave of attacks that he unleashed with a simple flick of his wrist. When the ones that were still alive attacked him, he didn’t even bother to dodge... plates of black metal instantaneously materialized and blocked whatever attack that managed to get near him.”

I felt my face tense as I tried to visualize what Vritra’s, and possibly the powers his whole race possessed, might be like. It seemed to be conjuring but on a completely different level. The way she described it made seem more akin to manifestation or even creation of certain phenomena rather than affecting the mana particles already existing.

How is that even possible though? Are they capable of just skipping steps in the fundamental laws of magic in this world, or were they simply more knowledgeable and able to do this through a special skill?

Cough *Cough*

My head immediately turned towards Alea as blood spurted out of her mouth.

“Vritra... He left after leaving me like this. I’m not sure if he knew someone was going to come, but the last thing he said before going was his name... and that Dicathen was going to be a warzone...” As blood dribbled down the corner of her mouth, she turned her head towards me.

“This may sound preposterous but can you do me a favor?” Alea lets out a faint smile, revealing her teeth stained in blood.

“Sure, anything.” Did she have something to give to her loved one back home? Did she want to convey a message to her family?

“Can you hold me?” She mumbles.

“...”

“I always thought that I didn’t need anyone... as long as I was strong enough. I never had a family or lover... to depend on... but you know? I-I really don’t want to die alone right now...” Alea breaks down as she bites her lower lip to stop herself from wailing.

Without saying a word, I wrap my arms around Alea’s fragile neck and waist, bringing her chest to mine.

“...I’m scared, Arthur.”

“I don’t want to die...”

I stayed silent, gritting my teeth as, again, was unable to find the words to comfort her. Softly patting the back of Alea’s head, I felt her breathing become weaker and weaker and moments later; she passed away in my arms.



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